Winter 2006

EDUCATION next

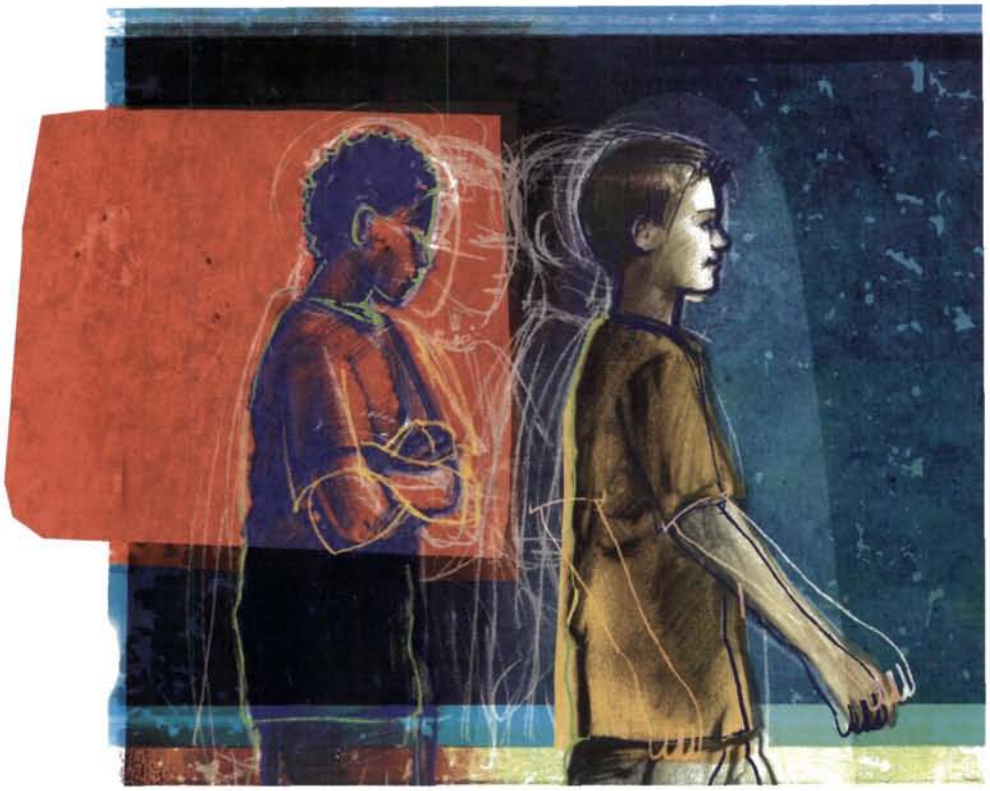
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

SPECIAL FORUM: The American High School — Can It Be Saved?

"Acting White"

Paying the social price for getting good grades

BY ROLAND G. FRYER



IN THIS ISSUE:

The Gates Foundation Goes to School, Advanced Placement Turns 50, Schools and the Internet, James Coleman's Adolescent Society

CONTRIBUTORS: JEFFREY MIREL, ANDREW MOLLISON, PAUL T. HILL, GEORGE M. HOLMES, JAY P. GREENE, MICHAEL PETRILLI, CHESTER E. FINN, JR., AUSTAN GOOLSBEE, JONATHAN GURYAN

www.educationnext.org / $7.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bestsellers from the Hoover Press

an assessment by the koret task force on k-12 education
Our Schools & Our Future
...are we still at risk?
edited by
Paul E. Peterson

Our Schools and Our Future

...are we still at risk?

EDITED BY PAUL E. PETERSON

This book assesses the changes that have occurred in the twenty years since *A Nation at Risk,* which urged major reforms in American education, was issued by the National Education Commission. It offers recommendations based on three core principles—accountability, choice, and transparency—that can reinvigorate the system and rekindle America's confidence in public education.

2003, 338 pages
ISBN: 0-8179-3922-9
$15.00 paper

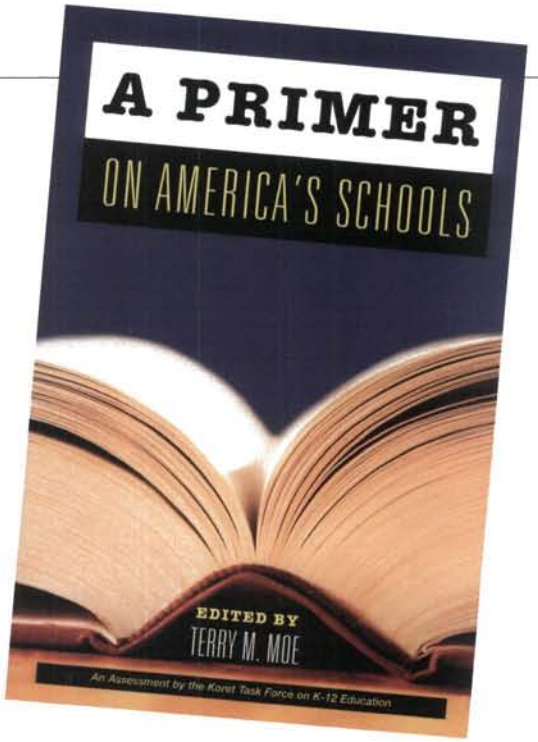
A Primer on America's Schools

EDITED BY TERRY M. MOE

These essays by members of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education carefully describe and assess the current state of American education.

"The contributors read like a 'who's who' of unconventional thinking on education reform."
—*Philanthropy Roundtable*

2001, 324 pages
ISBN: 0-8179-9942-6
$15.00 paper



To Order...

call 800.935.2882 or visit us online at www.hoover.org

HOOVER INSTITUTION

. . . ideas defining a free society

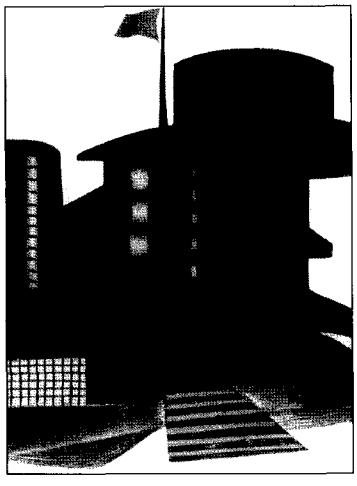
HOOVER INSTITUTION, Stanford University Toll-free: 877.466.8374 Fax: 650.723.1687 info@hoover.stanford.edu www.hoover.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

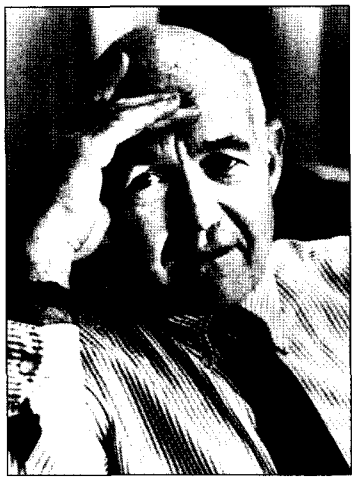
VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1

EDUCATION next

A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH



13



40

60

forum

13 The American High School

The Traditional High School by JEFFREY MIREL

A "Comprehensive" Problem by JAY P. GREENE

Things Are Falling Apart by CHESTER E. FINN JR.

features

34 Surviving a Midlife Crisis

Advanced placement turns fifty by ANDREW MOLLISON

40 The Adolescent Society

James Coleman's still-prescient insights

44 A Foundation Goes to School

Bill and Melinda Gates shift from computers in libraries to reform in high schools by PAUL T. HILL

COVER ILLUSTRATION by *Kevin Ghiglione*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1
EDUCATION next
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

research

52 "Acting White"
The social price paid by the best and brightest minority students
by ROLAND G. FRYER

60 World Wide Wonder?
Measuring the (non-)impact of Internet subsidies to public schools
by AUSTAN GOOLSBEE and JONATHAN GURYAN

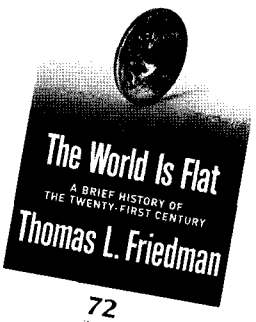
67 Friendly Competition
Does the presence of charters spur public schools to improve?
by GEORGE M. HOLMES, JEFF DeSIMONE and NICHOLAS G. RUPP

from the editors

5 High-School Headache
by PAUL E. PETERSON

the legal beat

7 No Lawsuit Left Behind
Chief Justice Roberts, the schoolmaster?
by MICHAEL HEISE



72

correspondence

8 *New York's adequacy case; underground education; North Carolina charters; the Bloomberg revolution*

book reviews

72 The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century
by THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN
REVIEWED by MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

74 I Am Charlotte Simmons by TOM WOLFE
Prep by CURTIS SITTENFELD
REVIEWED by DIANE RAVITCH

76 Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School
by MICA POLLOCK
REVIEWED by NATHAN GLAZER

78 Book Alert

school life

80 Foundations Matter
by ELI BROAD

Editor-in-Chief Paul E. Peterson
Senior Editor Chester E. Finn Jr.
Executive Editors Frederick M. Hess, Marci Kanstoroom
Research Editor Martin West
Managing Editor Carol Peterson
Manuscript Editor Peter Meyer
Design Director Bruce Sanders
Graphics Editor Mark Linnen
Consulting Editor Jay P. Greene
Editorial Staff Susan Pasternack, Deborah Styles
Design Production Robin Cheung
Web Editor Bridgitt Ahern
Circulation Jennifer Presley
Editorial Board John E. Chubb, Williamson Evers, Eric A. Hanushek, Paul Hill, E. D. Hirsch Jr., Caroline M. Hoxby, Terry M. Moe, Diane Ravitch, Herbert Walberg

Publisher Hoover Institution, Leland Stanford Junior University

Additional Sponsoring Institutions Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation; Manhattan Institute for Policy Research

Subscriptions *One-year subscription (four issues),* $20 in the United States; $30 in Canada; $40 elsewhere. To subscribe or to submit change of address information, call us at (800) 935-2882; fax us at (650) 723-8626; visit us at www.educationnext.org; or email us at hooverpress@hoover.stanford.edu. You may also write to *Education Next* Subscriptions, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010. Cover price is $7/issue. ISSN 1539-9672.

Advertising For information on advertising, please contact Advertising Manager, Program on Education Policy and Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 495-6954.

Letters We welcome letters about our contents. Longer versions of some letters may be found at www.educationnext.org. Write to Letters to the Editor, *Education Next,* 309 CGIS South, 1730 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; fax to (617) 496-1507; or email Editor_EM@latte.harvard.edu.

Editorial Queries We consider unsolicited contributions. *Send manuscript submissions as email attachments to* Editor_EM@latte.harvard.edu. Pieces sent by regular mail go to Carol Peterson, *Education Next,* 309 CGIS South, 1730 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

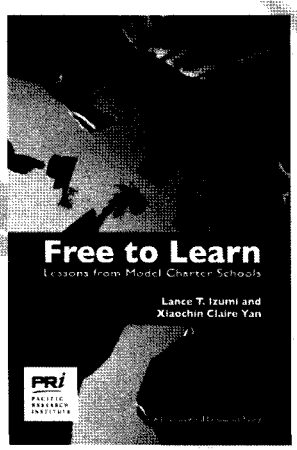
Opinions expressed in *Education Next* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board of *Education Next,* the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, or the sponsors of *Education Next.*

Visit us at http://www.educationnext.org, where unabridged essays can be found.

© by the Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, 2006

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Why do some charter schools succeed while others fail?



Some of California's charter schools, often serving low-income regions, are shattering the status quo and producing remarkable gains in student achievement. Discover the reasons for their success in the new book ***Free to Learn: Lessons from Model Charter Schools***, published by the Pacific Research Institute — a leading California think tank at the forefront of education policy.

"*Free to Learn* chronicles the record of charter schools in high poverty areas achieving remarkable results where students in traditional schools were failing. The innovative methods used in these successful charter schools and outlined in this book should be a roadmap for educators, policymakers, and parents seeking the best educational opportunities for students."

Charles Poochigian
California state senator

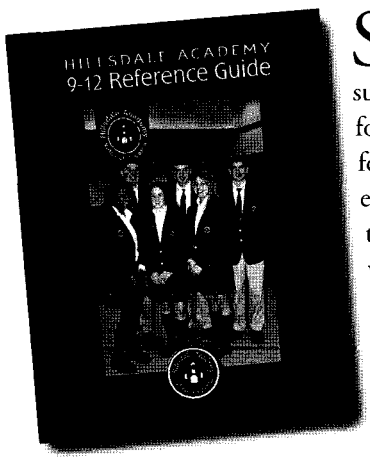
Order *Free to Learn* ($14.95 + shipping and handling) at www.pacificresearch.org or call 800.276.7600/email smartin@pacificresearch.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*

FOR GRADES 9-12

NOW AVAILABLE!



Since its founding as a K-8 school in 1990, Hillsdale Academy has ranked in the top four percent of schools nationwide in standardized testing. This tradition of success now continues in the Academy's Upper School, where students in grades 9-12 follow a common, college preparatory course of study. Required courses include four years each of Humane Letters (history and literature, including civics and economics in the senior year), Latin, laboratory science and mathematics. Now, this complete academic program is available to you. Continuing where the *K-8 Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide* left off, the *Reference Guide* for grades 9-12 provides:

Graduation requirements and curriculum overview
School culture guidelines
Course syllabi
Parent and faculty handbooks

Hillsdale Academy
Virtus et Sapientia

To download the *K-8* or *9-12 Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*, visit **www.hillsdale.edu/academy**.
Printed copies may be ordered by returning the form below, or by calling (800) 989-7323.

Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide ORDER FORM

NAME _____ TITLE _____

SCHOOL _____ E-MAIL _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE (h) _____ (w) _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

❒ *K-8 Reference Guide*, w/ video ($100)
❒ *9-12 Reference Guide*, w/ video ($100)
❒ Both *Guides*, w/ video ($175)
❒ Video only ($10)

❒ My check payable to **Hillsdale Academy** is enclosed.

❒ Please charge my ❒ VISA ❒ MASTERCARD ❒ DISCOVER

CARD NUMBER _____ EXP. DATE _____ SIGNATURE *(Cardholder signature required to validate your card payment.)*

MAIL COMPLETED FORM TO: HILLSDALE ACADEMY REFERENCE GUIDE, 33 EAST COLLEGE STREET, HILLSDALE, MI 49242.
PLEASE ALLOW SIX TO EIGHT WEEKS FOR DELIVERY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

High-School Headache

An institution that works neither for the "talented tenth" nor those at greatest risk

he American high school no longer works, Bill Gates tells us, not for the best or the brightest, nor for those at risk of falling off the education ladder.

Gates is right. Take the latest results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the nation's report card, which just updated to 2004 the "progress" we haven't made since the early 1970s. Even among the "talented tenth," those in the top 10 percent of test-takers, reading scores have dropped 4 points since 1971, and math scores have not budged since they were first measured in 1978. In August the College Board released results from the latest SAT exams, announcing that the scores were "an all-time high." Overlooked by most of the press was the fact that the increases were caused by private-school improvements; SAT scores for public school students were stagnant.

If we are to regain our education strength, we need to hold students responsible.

At the other end of the scale, dropout rates have actually increased since 1990, rising to 30 percent of all 17-year-olds. Among African Americans the dropout rate is somewhere between 50 and 60 percent, a sad fact that is one of the best-kept secrets in American education. So few people know how big these dropout numbers are that, in a recent book, Michael Dyson scolds Bill Cosby for (accurately) lamenting the fact that only half of African Americans graduate from high school (see p. 78). Dyson "corrected" him, saying the dropout rate is only 17 percent, an inaccuracy that earned Dyson warm praise from a *New York Times* book reviewer.

The *Times* error only shows how successful the public education cartel has been in deceiving the public. To hide the actual dropout rate, most school districts report as dropouts those who entered the year as seniors but did not remain in school until the end of that year. All the dropouts over the preceding three years, and all the summers in between, when most dropping out actually occurs, are statistically ignored.

The U.S. Department of Education has long been complicit in fostering the misperception. To his credit, Russ Whitehurst, head of the department's Institute of Education Sciences, is now actively working to remedy the situation. So are the nation's governors, recently embarked on a Herculean effort to develop a multistate definition of high-school completion.

Getting the facts right will be a start. And President Bush is to be congratulated on identifying the American high school as the place where school reform must now focus. But, as Chester Finn notes (see *forum*, p. 27), the administration's strategy is going nowhere fast.

Several essays in this issue of *Education Next* show that we have based our high-school policies on two contradictory assumptions: 1) adolescents are experienced and can choose their own curriculum from the shopping mall of choices available; 2) adolescents should not be held responsible for their performance. Thus testing expectations should be minimalist and graduation requirements should be readily achievable, provided students comply with compulsory attendance laws. Just how this notion got started is well described in Jeff Mirel's history of the American high school (*forum*, p. 14). And James Coleman's classic essay (*features*, p. 40) reminds us that not much will change until the organization of schools fosters learning communities, not anti-learning ones.

No wonder the United States is desperately searching for ways to import talent, while excluding terrorists, from abroad. If we are to regain our education strength in a world where other nations are passing us by, we need to hold students responsible for more than just selecting the courses they want to take. To graduate from high school, students should be expected to pass, at as high a level as they can, a challenging, substantive examination in a variety of subjects that allows them to demonstrate, to colleges and to employers, just how accomplished they are. As Andrew Mollison shows (*features*, p. 34), the Advanced Placement test is a good beginning, but until more than 10 percent of all public school students take that test, it is not going to have broad impact.

Finally, as Jay Greene argues (*forum*, p. 23), high-school students, more mobile than their younger siblings, could challenge themselves if they were given a range of schools from which to choose, and those schools could also choose them, as happens at the college level. When both young people and high schools are given the opportunity to choose, each will begin to hold the other accountable.

— Paul E. Peterson

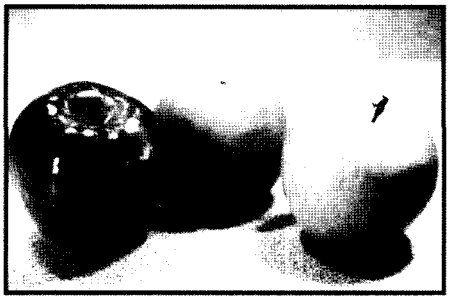
MISSION STATEMENT In the stormy seas of school reform, this journal will steer a steady course, presenting the facts as best they can be determined, giving voice (without fear or favor) to worthy research, sound ideas, and responsible arguments. Bold change is needed in American K-12 education, but *Education Next* partakes of no program, campaign, or ideology. It goes where the evidence points.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW

CHOICE AND COMPETITION IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

EDITED BY
PAUL E. PETERSON



CHOICE AND COMPETITION IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Edited by Paul E. Peterson

This book examines the likely promise and pitfalls of many of the most controversial forms of school choice as well as the introduction of greater competition into the recruitment and compensation of teachers and principals. In a group of essays originally published in *Education Next*, these essays paint the picture of an education landscape that will be greatly shaped by choice and competition in the 21st century.

November 2005, 224 pages
0-7425-4581-4 $21.95 paper
0-7425-4580-6 $60.00 cloth

Visit our website for sample chapters!

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
4501 Forbes Blvd., Ste. 200 Lanham, MD 20706
Phone: 1-800-462-6420 Fax: 1-800-338-4550
Order Online and Save 15% at www.rowmanlittlefield.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No Lawsuit Left Behind

Chief Justice Roberts, the Schoolmaster?

BY MICHAEL HEISE

From the perspective of newspaper headlines, judicial activity on the education front was uncharacteristically unspectacular last year. Unlike blockbuster cases in the recent past, ranging from publicly funded vouchers (*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 2002) to affirmative action (*Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, 2003) and religion (*Locke v. Davey*, 2004), the Supreme Court last term said little of significance about education.

Below the high court, however, was a veritable ant farm of judicial activity concerning our schools. This legal trench warfare involves critical issues that may give Chief Justice John Roberts plenty to do for years to come. Most of the action centered on the unsexy but significant question of the allocation of authority in education policymaking. A growing number of nasty fights between and among federal, state, and local officials about how to manage education resources emerged, and include two notable cases: *Pontiac v. Spellings* and *Connecticut v. Spellings*.

Much of this intergovernmental jockeying derives from resentment generated by No Child Left Behind.

These cases, and much other intergovernmental jockeying, derive from resentment generated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The historic law dramatically increased the federal government's influence in K–12 education policy, and hostility toward the law has been percolating for some time. The transition from hostility to federal education policy to formal litigation should surprise no one.

What was not anticipated, however, was the federal law's influence on litigation concerning the adequacy of school financing. Thus the National Education Association and the several public-school districts in Michigan that sued the Department of Education last April in *Pontiac v. Spellings*, asserted that NCLB is an unfunded mandate and, for relief, sought the ability to use federal education funds as they saw fit. Similarly, last August the state of Connecticut sued the federal government (*Connecticut v. Spellings*) on the grounds of unfunded mandate and for perceived "inflexibility" regarding the state's numerous NCLB waiver applications.

Though both lawsuits will probably fail in the courts (see "NEA Sues over NCLB," *legal beat*, Fall 2005), they are already having a political effect on the way that education funds are obtained and distributed. And they may already be more effective in diluting NCLB requirements than an army of Capitol Hill lobbyists has been. In an effort to buy some political peace, or perhaps in response to the litigation, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings recently announced additional "flexibility" and a "common-sense" approach for states' regulatory compliance with NCLB. It is too early to tell whether the DOE's modified approach will fuel even more state foot dragging, but the winds of compromise are blowing.

It will also be worth watching how NCLB affects other litigation concerning school finance. Although state and local district feuds over school funding persist, these disagreements are increasingly cast in a way to implicate the 2002 federal law. The Supreme Court's *Rodriguez* decision in 1973 may have insulated the federal government from any direct constitutional liability flowing from per-pupil spending gaps within a state, but many school-finance activists view NCLB as creating a federal statutory avenue for helping to transform failure in the classroom into success in the courtroom. Any legal success, however, comes out of state coffers, not the U.S. Treasury. The dynamic of a federal law's generating increased financial exposure for state lawmakers helps explain why some states, such as Louisiana, Colorado, and Connecticut, are lowering student achievement standards —and taking proactive measures in court.

Viewed in isolation, these issues—NCLB litigation, the U.S. Department of Education's tinkering with NCLB compliance, and school-finance litigation—may not suggest anything out of the ordinary. Viewed collectively, however, the thread that binds all three is NCLB and, more important, how the act restructures K–12 education federalism. Fights over K–12 policymaking now loom even larger on the horizon and increasingly threaten to exacerbate an already litigious education culture. Roberts, long thought to be a states' rights advocate, may be forced to rethink such matters.

Michael Heise is professor of law, Cornell Law School.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Checking NYC's Facts

e take the essence of Eric Hanushek's article ("Pseudo Science and a Sound Basic Education," *check the facts*, Fall 2005) to be that existing means for appraising "adequate" school financing levels are, at best, inexact, and when in the hands of irresponsible advocates, often result simply in "junk science."

Perhaps surprising to some readers, the principals of Management Analysis & Planning (MAP) concur with his thesis.

Indeed, in several articles published elsewhere, we have stated that in pursuing the doctrine of "adequacy," the judicial system has far outstripped the capacity of social science to provide precise and verifiable answers.

How much does it take to enable a student from economically disadvantaged circumstances to achieve state-specified learning standards in mathematics, science, or language arts? What should high-school class sizes be? What are the characteristics of an effective teacher, one who achieves superior student outcomes?

Frankly, anyone who claims to know with certainty the answers to these crucial questions is usually an unabashed advocate for more money for schools and has little respect for policy analysis or research. We believe that qualified professionals who have demonstrated success providing instruction to diverse student populations can apply their knowledge to the discussion about what programs and processes are more likely to produce desired student outcomes. For that MAP offers no apologies. However, when professional judgment panel results are misused, that is indeed a problem, and it is in such circumstances Hanushek's argument deserves attention.

MAP has never claimed, in any of its adequacy studies, to have determined the amount below which expenditures are inadequate. We always offer estimates for policymakers to consider given assumptions specified in the analytic and estimation exercises. We had no control over how New York referees would use the report and its findings. We share Professor Hanushek's concern that the referees apparently relied on a bottom-line estimate without considering the assumptions and methodology underlying that estimate. Had they done so they would have discovered several assumptions and statistical procedures that served to inflate the estimate, but about which reasonable experts could disagree.

We share Professor Hanushek's concern that the referees apparently relied on a bottom-line estimate without considering the assumptions and methodology underlying that estimate.

That said, Professor Hanushek's thesis falls a bit shy, and here is why.

Professor Hanushek's criticisms of the voodoo science of professional judgment and successful schools models of adequacy analysis, though justified when they are used to determine "the" number, lead then to reliance upon another analytic technique, cost-function analysis. But that, when applied by economists to the circumstances in New York, called for even more money than any of the professional judgment analyses specified.

In many ways, AIR/MAP (American Institutes for Research) figures were the median of all estimates if one includes those produced by William Duncombe and John Yinger of Syracuse. The latter use a cost-function analysis and claim to incorporate "efficiency" into their estimation models. Thus criticisms of the professional judgment studies without addressing cost-function estimates leave Hanushek's arguments incomplete and open to even higher estimates by advocates relying upon econometric methods.

MAP acknowledges and, when provided with an opportunity, has always insisted that any infusion of additional school money should be accompanied by other systemic reforms, including stronger accountability for school failure with an emphasis on performance above all else, changes in antiquated systems (for example, single-salary schedules), and a stronger focus on evaluations to determine success and failure of programs and individuals. We realize that money by itself is not an answer to the nation's education challenges.

Professor Hanushek does not declare how much money is the "right" amount for New York. That is good. He should not. No one knows the "right" amount. However, one can know the right process. The right process is to provide the political system with the best advice one can and then let the deliberative dynamics of representative government take hold.

JAMES R. SMITH
President
JAMES W. GUTHRIE
Chairman, Management Analysis and Planning, Inc.

Eric Hanushek replies:

The MAP principals underscore a fundamental problem that runs throughout the use of costing-out studies, in New York and elsewhere. School finance policy is politics, in both the good and bad sense of the term. While science may provide guidance on some aspects of the problem, the costing-out studies are not scientific in the traditional sense. Even so, partisans in the dispute distort and misuse those studies under the banner of science.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The authors, even with the best of intentions, unleash a process that they cannot control—and at least in this case, seem dismayed by.

As Smith and Guthrie point out, other methods have now found their way into the costing-out world, including the cost-function method. (Still another is the "state of the art" or evidence-based method.) Although they did not play a prominent role in the CFE judgment, such models have been introduced in a number of other state court cases and legislative deliberations. As Smith and Guthrie indicate, these alternatives are no better than the professional judgment or successful schools approaches—and may be worse in important dimensions.

It is clear, though, why costing-out studies are almost always commissioned by partisans in the school finance debates. Courts and legislatures are not going to make any nuanced use of them, but instead tend to extract a number, paint it as science, and use it for their purposes. Think alchemy, not science.

North Carolina Charters

enowned pollster George Gallup once referred to data gathering this way: "Not everything that can be counted counts; and not everything that counts can be counted." This comment is apropos to any discussion of charter school research, especially recent findings from Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd ("Results from the Tar Heel State," *research*, Fall 2005). Their study, sharply critical of North Carolina charter schools, is flawed and fails to "count" what matters most to parents and students.

The authors conclude that charter schools negatively affect performance, and that the public interest is not "well-served" by these schools. Consider, though, that only students who either entered a charter school after 4th grade, or exited a charter school before 8th grade, were included in their main analysis. This means that longer-term charter-school attendees (and, presumably, those students deriving the greatest benefit from these schools, since they stayed put) were excluded. In addition, the data used to assess performance came from state end-of-grade tests measuring knowledge of state curriculum—a seemingly obvious bias against innovative charter schools exercising their freedom to employ alternative curricula.

Bifulco and Ladd's data also differ from recent Department of Public Instruction statistics. In 2004–05, 63 percent of regular North Carolina

charter schools made adequate yearly progress under federal accountability guidelines, compared with just 58 percent of traditional public schools. Charter schools were also more likely to earn the label "school of excellence" than traditional public schools (33 percent compared to 24 percent).

And what about those intangibles that aren't easily "counted"? Charter schools (and choice programs) empower parents—not school boards—with the freedom to select the best school for their child. In the final analysis, Bifulco and Ladd's study demonstrates what parents have known all along: no one school can possibly meet the needs of all students, be it public, private, or charter. But charter schools do provide valuable and much-needed options, often to poor and disenfranchised families who cannot afford private school tuition. Doesn't it make sense to let parents be the ultimate arbiters of whether their interests are "well-served" by charter schools?

LINDALYN KAKADELIS
Director, North Carolina Education Alliance

Bifulco and Ladd's negative conclusion about North Carolina charters is much less certain than it appears. For instance, despite their finding that students in charters make less academic progress than students in regular public schools, enrollment in N.C. charter schools persists, and grows.

It's also troubling that the negative effect of charters that they report depends upon charter age. My research shows that the apparent negative effect of charters in their third year, or older, was small—.01 to .03 standard deviations—and in some instances insignificant. I also find that the negative effect varied by grade level: larger for 3rd through 5th graders and statistically insignificant for 6th through 8th graders.

The authors also tout their method as addressing the problem of self-selection. It does, but at a cost. The method can mislead unless we understand why students enter charters and why students leave. Some students enter because they are having difficulty in the regular public schools, difficulty that continues to affect them, even worsen, while attending charters. As for students leaving charters, charters may simply not be a good fit for everybody. No doubt some students leave Ivy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

League colleges and do better elsewhere. Does that mean the Ivy League schools are teaching poorly?

Finally, the effect of charters on students who leave is likely a worst-case estimate; it should be complemented by one comparing the academic growth of students who stay in charters with the effect of students who stay in regular public schools. My research finds that math-score growth for North Carolina students who stay in charters is not significantly different from students who stay in regular public schools; reading-score growth is higher, significantly so, for students staying four or five consecutive years.

CRAIG NEWMARK
Associate Professor of Economics
North Carolina State University

Bifulco and Ladd reply:

We agree with Ms. Kakadelis that test scores don't count for everything. At the same time, they clearly matter, especially in a state such as North Carolina that has long had a statewide course of study and a set of state tests aligned with that curriculum. Given that state taxes are used to pay for charter schools, the public has a valid interest in the extent to which the students in those schools are meeting state achievement goals.

Like Kakadelis, we support the idea of more schooling options, especially for students in low-income families. We differ, however, in wanting those new options to be as effective in promoting student achievement, at least on average, as the traditional public schools. Our study indicates that North Carolina charter schools are not meeting that standard.

Newmark, whose own detailed study of North Carolina charter schools also finds negative achievement effects, suggests our results are misleading because students who choose charter schools may be on a downward achievement trajectory before they switch to a charter school. The full version of our paper reports an additional test to rule out this hypothesis.

Bloomberg's revolution

ol Stern's "An Education Revolution That Never Was" (*forum*, Fall 2005) is neither forthright about education in New York City nor informed about education generally, as his use of sources and data makes evident.

He quotes a teacher alleging that she was punished for asking "uncomfortable questions" during training, for example. He neglects to mention the thousands of teachers who applaud our professional development. Nor does he mention that we have had more teacher applications than ever before.

On our alleged unwillingness to use phonics-centered reading programs, Stern quotes the developer of one such program whose $27 million contract with the city was discontinued. Stern notes that this reading program helped raise scores in the city's lowest-performing schools in the 1990s. But he fails to mention that the program was part of an intensive effort to improve these schools that included a vast infusion of additional resources, including teachers for class-size reduction, capping of enrollment, coaches, administrators, and restructuring—elements of our reform for *all* schools. And Stern doesn't take issue with improved test scores unless they are *our* scores—which represent the greatest gains in memory.

Stern's fixed idea about the teaching of phonics obscures the central point in our curriculum reforms: phonics is essential to reading instruction, but it is not the only essential skill. Anyone who has taught children knows this at least intuitively. As even a brief visit to our web site indicates, the New York public schools offer a rich and diverse menu of reading programs and interventions for its students. We tailor offerings to a student's needs: not all children need a fortified diet of phonics, but those who do, get it.

Stern also fails to mention how some of our early critics are now our supporters—experts who criticized our phonics component in 2003 (his sole point of reference) have been partners and advisors in the intervention strategies we have designed with help from special-education consultant Dr. Eileen Marzola.

We value the experience and the different strengths of our teachers. We understand the potential and the strengths of our students. That is why we have a curriculum and interventions that allow for nuance, creativity, critical thinking, and academic rigor. The results show it.

CARMEN FARINA
Deputy Chancellor for
Teaching and Learning
New York City
Department of Education

Sol Stern replies:

Ms. Farina writes that "thousands of teachers applaud our professional development." How does she know? The DOE has never asked the teachers for their opinion. She claims that the Success for All phonics program was only "part" of the reason for academic improvement in the lowest scoring schools. Again, how does she know? Her department didn't study SFA's relative contribution before it recklessly ditched the program. She says some "early critics" have become supporters, but only cites someone who's on the DOE payroll. All of which highlights one of the main points of my article: namely, that we need an independent research agency to evaluate DOE operations and claims of success. Otherwise, all we have is spin from a mayoral agency dedicated to getting the boss reelected.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tooley's concern that public intervention crowds out private initiative in education is not well placed.

feature

Private Schools for the Poor

STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES TOOLEY

EDUCATION WHERE NO ONE EXPECTS IT

The accepted wisdom is that private schools serve the privileged classes everywhere, especially the poor in countries with public school. The poor, we believe, need government assistance if they are to get a good education, which helps explain why in the United States many school-choice enthusiasts believe that the only way the poor can get the education they deserve is through vouchers or charter schools—proxies for those better-private or independent schools, paid for with public funds.

But if we reflect on these beliefs in a foreign context and observe how income families in underprivileged and developing countries, we find these assumptions lacking. We have found remarkable innovative ways of helping themselves educationally, and in some of the most destitute places on Earth have managed to maintain a large and growing number of private schools for themselves.

For the past two years I have overseen research on such schools in India, China, and sub-Saharan Africa. The project,

funded by the John Templeton Foundation, was inspired by a serendipitous discovery of mine while I was engaged in some consulting work for the International Finance Corporation, the private finance arm of the World Bank. Taking time out from evaluating an obscure private school in Hyderabad, India, I stumbled on a crowd of private schools in slums behind the Chamiraj, the 16th century tourist attraction in the central city. It was something that I had never imagined, and I immediately began to wonder whether

private schools serving the poor could be found in other countries. That question eventually took me to five countries—Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, India, and China—and to dozens of different rural and urban locales, all in terribly poor. Since the data gathered from Lagos, Nigeria, and Delhi, India, are just not fully analyzed, this article reports on findings only from Ga[illegible] Province, China; Ga, Ghana; Hyderabad, India; and Bo[illegible], Kenya. These are in vastly different settings, but the research teams and I found large num-

Private Schools for the Poor

James Tooley ("Underground Education," *features*, Fall 2005) reports widespread existence of private schools in five poor countries—India, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and (to a lesser extent) China—and addresses two common "myths" about such schooling: that "private education for the poor does not exist" and that "private education for the poor is low quality."

Evidence for debunking the first myth already existed nearly a decade ago. Several studies found that even the poorest households in India and Pakistan use private schools extensively. Tooley's contribution is to extend the South Asian evidence to countries in Africa and to test it in communist China.

His findings also add to the evidence base on the second myth: namely, that, in several developing countries, private school students outperform their public-school counterparts after controlling for schools' student-intakes. Thus the article helps to build a fuller picture of private and public schools for the poor in developing countries and adds to existing knowledge.

However, I believe that Tooley's concern that public intervention crowds out private initiative in education is not well placed. First, the evidence adduced for such a trade-off is weak. Second, surely one should not lament parents' abandonment of private for public schools when fees are abolished in the latter. It is a welfare-maximizing choice parents make in light of information about their circumstances, which is far more information than that available to the analyst.

While agreeing with Tooley that private schools tend to provide better-quality education (as I also found in a 1996 study I conducted), I would be more cautious and nuanced about the policy implications. Tooley advocates reform programs that support private initiative with government support, such as voucher schemes and charter schools. From colonial times, India has used a charter-like system of publicly funded, privately produced education; such private-public partnerships are called "aided" schools. However, evidence from Uttar Pradesh, India, suggests that such schools are just as ineffective and poorly resourced as public schools.

Thus private ownership per se may not be the key. Other attendant factors are also crucial: whether there are performance criteria or incentives built in to the formula for government aid (there are none in India); how much central oversight the government provides (a great deal in India); and to what extent the government is able to resist demands from aided-school teachers to be granted the same employment and other arrangements as those existing for public school teachers.

In Uttar Pradesh, militantly organized aided-school teachers' unions have demanded and successfully obtained treatment comparable to that received by public school teachers. Over time, aided schools have become very similar to public schools in terms of level of teachers' salaries, school resources, centralized administration, salary disbursement, teacher appointment procedures, and student achievement outcomes. Aided-school teachers are no longer locally accountable. This example encourages caution in assuming that private delivery of publicly funded education is a panacea. A good deal of thought may be necessary about the design of incentives in the grant to such schools and on how to keep "private" truly private by resisting demands from vested interests to make such schools more like public schools.

GEETA KINGDON
Research Officer, Centre for the Study of African Economies
University of Oxford

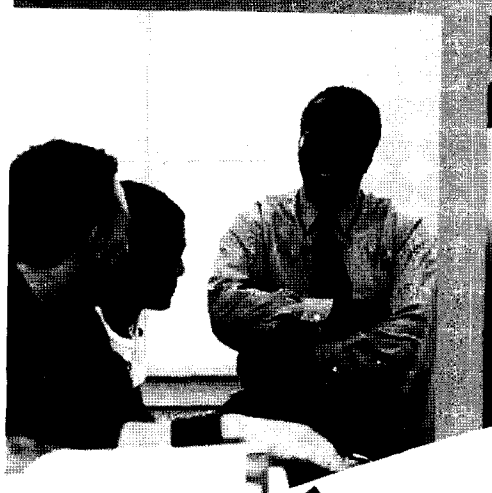
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

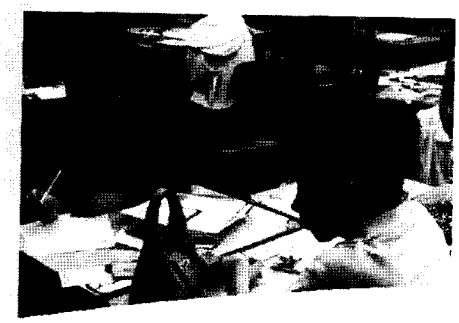
Edexcellence.net:

THOMAS B. FORDHAM FOUNDATION
OUTSIDE THE BOX

www.edexcellence.net

Research, analysis, and action in K-12 education
from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

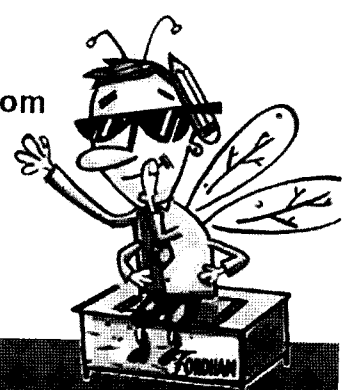




Resources for research and action in education reform

Groundbreaking new reports in K-12 education

Weekly news and analysis from the Education Gadfly

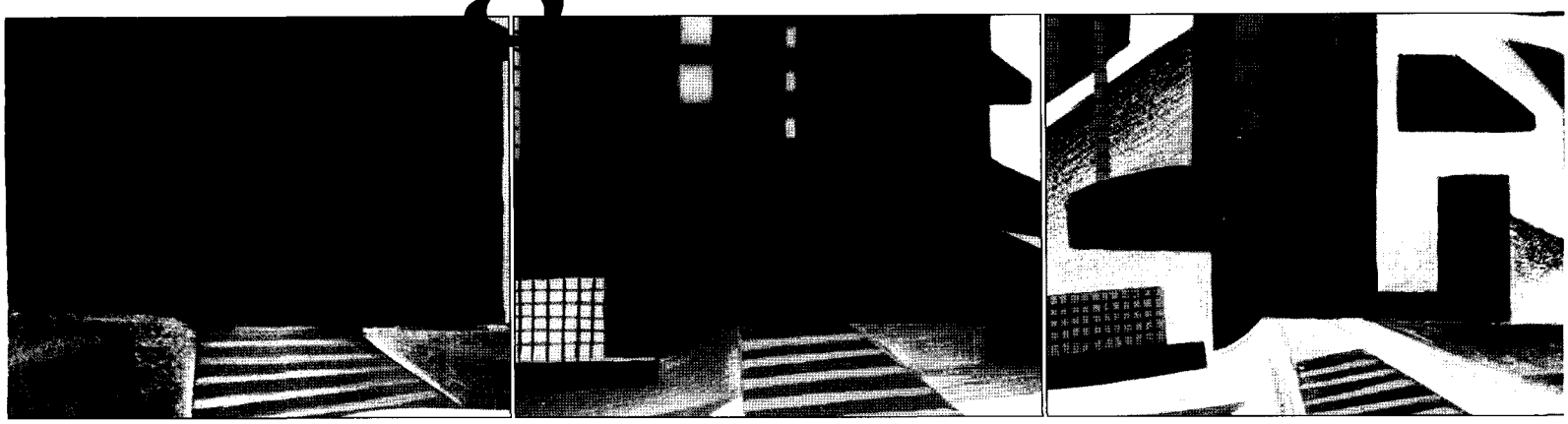


www.edexcellence.net

Education Gadfly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE AMERICAN High School



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DON KILPATRICK

CAN IT BE SAVED?

The American high school, once an austere brick building serving a few hundred children, mostly white boys, who studied reading, writing, and arithmetic, has grown into a sprawling mall complex for thousands of boys *and* girls, of various ethnic groups, offering something—from algebra to band and basketball—for everyone.

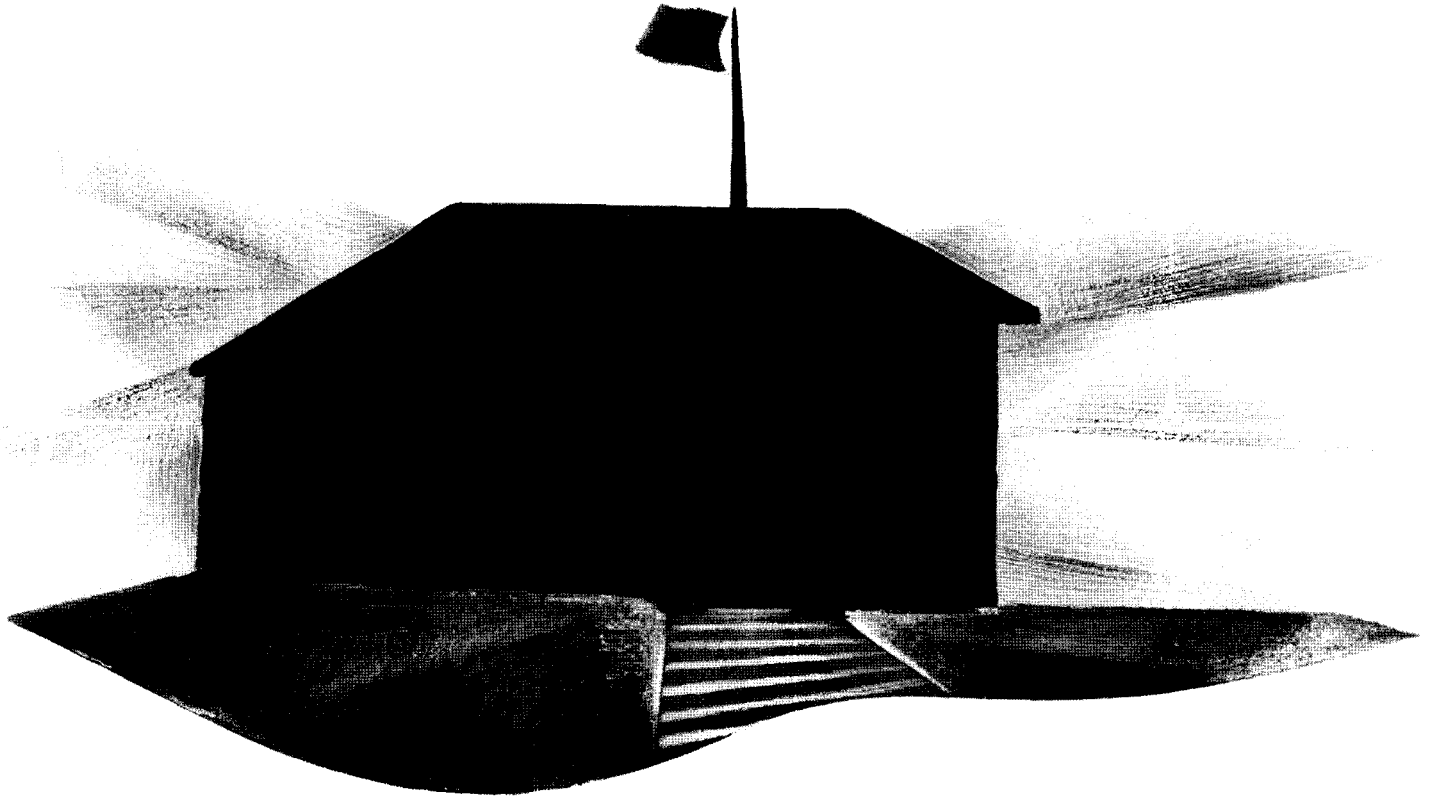
Is such a school right for education in 2005? Last spring, in a much-quoted speech, Bill Gates, whose education philanthropy is the subject of another story in this issue (p. 44), told the National Governors Association that America's high schools were "obsolete." Even when they're "working exactly as designed," he said, they "cannot teach our kids what they need to know today."

How did we get here? Is it where we should be? In the following pages Jeffrey Mirel traces the roots of the modern high school, Jay Greene documents the sad facts of the current crisis, and Chester Finn assesses the proposed remedies, while providing guidance for would-be reformers.

The Traditional High School by Jeffrey Mirel 14
A "Comprehensive" Problem by Jay P. Greene 23
Things Are Falling Apart by Chester E. Finn Jr. 27

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE TRADITIONAL High School



HISTORICAL DEBATES OVER ITS NATURE AND FUNCTION

BY JEFFREY MIREL

For more than a century, American educators and education policymakers have chosen sides in a great debate about the nature and function of American high schools. The origins of this long-running argument can be traced to 1893, when the influential Committee of Ten, a blue-chip panel of educators, issued a report proposing that all public high-school students receive a strong, liberal-arts education. Ever since then we have been fighting about whether our high schools should be college prep for the masses or, as another blue-ribbon panel would put it 90 years later, a "cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main course."

There have been, of course, winners and losers on both sides throughout this long discussion, as our high schools have grown into multibillion-dollar institutions serving, or ill serving, hundreds of millions of American adolescents.

Yet the question of winners and losers in this debate about our secondary schools is, to borrow a phrase, academic. The reality is that, quite some time ago, our high schools were set on a course of diversification. And the questions today are whether and how much this "comprehensive high school" has contributed to the declining quality of secondary education in this country. On this issue, we can learn much from history.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Committee of Ten v. *Cardinal Principles*

There is little dispute about the historical importance of the report of the Committee of Ten. Appointed by the National Education Association (NEA), the committee, composed mainly of presidents of leading colleges, was charged with establishing curriculum standardization for public-high-school students who intended to go to college. During the previous half century, from roughly 1840 to 1890, the public high school had gradually emerged from the shadow of the private academy. While enrollments were still small by today's standards (probably less than 5 percent of American teenagers attended public high school in the post-Civil War era), by the 1870s and 1880s the number of public secondary schools was increasing fast enough to occasion some attention. And the Committee of Ten was convened to bring some order to the varied curricula that were growing with them.

Under the leadership of Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, the committee undertook a broad and comprehensive exploration of the role of the high school in American life, concluding, significantly, that *all* public-high-school students should follow a college preparatory curriculum, regardless of their backgrounds, their intention to stay in school through graduation, or their plans to pursue higher education. As Eliot, author of the final report, put it, "every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease...."

From Eliot's perspective, high schools fulfilled the promise of equal opportunity for education by insisting that all students take the same types of rigorous academic courses. While the Committee of Ten did suggest different programs of study for high schools (for example, programs specializing in classical languages, science and mathematics, or modern languages) and introduced the concept of electives to American high schools, its guiding principle was that all students should receive the same high-quality liberal arts education.

It is not hard to see where the battle lines would have been drawn, even then, especially as a wave of new immigrants was bringing tens of thousands of foreign adolescents to our shores. G. Stanley Hall, a noted psychologist and president of Clark University, denounced the Committee of Ten's curriculum recommendations, because, he said, most high-school students were part of a "great army of incapables ... who should be in schools for the dullards or subnormal children." Numerous critics joined Hall in attacking the Committee's report as an elitist view of reality. But the reality was that soon the number of students aged 14–17 attending high school soared, rising from 359,949, less than 6 percent of the age group, to 4,804,255, almost 51 percent of the age group, between 1890 and 1930 (see Figure 1).

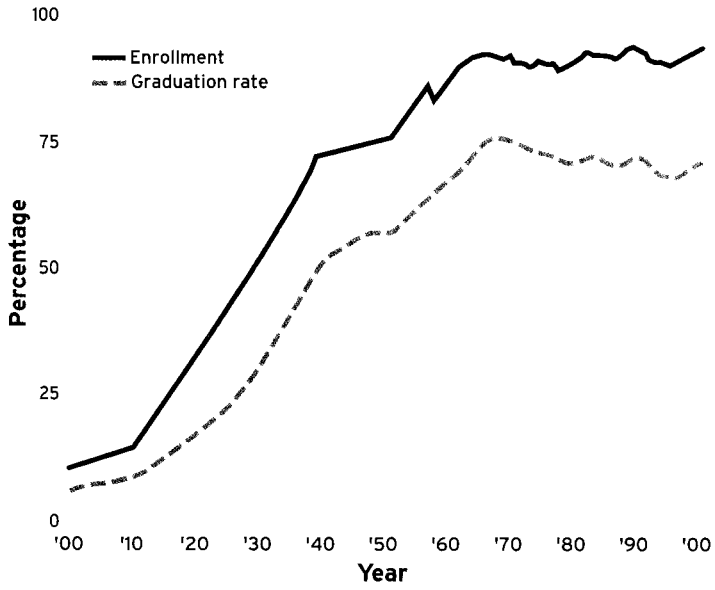
In the middle of this demographic revolution, in 1918, another NEA group, this one called the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, issued a manifesto that turned the fundamental belief of the Committee of Ten on its head. It called for expanded and differentiated high-school programs, which it believed would more effectively serve the new and diverse high-school student population.

This commission's final report, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, built its case on two interrelated assumptions that became central to discussions of the American high school for most of the 20th century. First, it assumed that most new high-school students were less intelligent than previous generations of students. Second, it claimed that since these new students lacked the intellectual ability, aspirations, and financial means to attend college, it was counterproductive to demand that they follow a college-preparatory program.

The End of the Secondary-School Surge (Figure 1)

High-school enrollment increased dramatically over most of the 20th century. But after 1970 it leveled off and graduation rates started to decline.

High-School Enrollment and Graduation Rates



Note: Percentage enrollment is the total high-school enrollment divided by the total population aged 14 to 17. The graduation rate is the number of high-school graduates in a given year divided by the total number of 17-year-olds.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Carnegie Units *Defining a high-school education*

by Barney J. Brawer

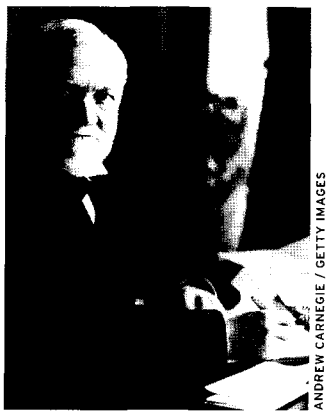
There may be much speculation about the origin of the education species that is the American high school. Was it intelligent design or simply evolution? In fact, the DNA of modern secondary schooling was implanted as a seemingly unrelated education initiative. In the early part of the 20th century, Andrew Carnegie decided to establish a retirement fund for elderly college professors, gave $10 million to his Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to get the project going, and the rest is, as they say, history.

A College by Any Other Name

Henry Pritchett, first president of the Carnegie Foundation, wrote in the foundation's first annual report (1906) that "the most important question with which the Board has to deal [in creating the college pension fund] ... is that of determining what educational standard shall be set up: in other words, what is a 'college' ...?" College professors, Pritchett noted, frequently complained that high schools "do not furnish them pupils fitted to sustain high entrance conditions." Principals of high schools complained, "with equal truth, that they cannot keep students in high schools when they are allowed to enter colleges and universities after completion of half or three-quarters of their high school work."

The problem of where high school ended and college began was not a trivial one. In 1885, Charles Foster Smith of Vanderbilt University had attributed the scarcity of high schools in the South to the admission practices of the region's colleges. The colleges, he said, published requirements for admission, but rarely enforced them. "Since the boy is not required to prepare for college, he comes to college without preparation." Nor was the problem restricted to the South. Even the nation's most prestigious colleges were admitting half or more of their students "on condition," that is, deficient in preparation. In 1908, for example, students admitted "on condition," some as young as 14, constituted 49 percent, 53 percent, and 58 percent of their respective classes at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

Add to this nebulous college entrance environment the challenge presented by the proliferation of four-year high schools, whose numbers skyrocketed from 2,526 in 1890 to 10,213 in 1910, and it is easy to see why the trustees of the Carnegie Foundation felt the need to define college: "An institution to be ranked a college must have at least six (6) professors giving their entire time to college and university work, a course of four full years in liberal arts and sciences, and should require for admission not less than the usual four years of academic or high school preparation, or its equivalent, in addition to the preacademic or grammar school studies."



ANDREW CARNEGIE / GETTY IMAGES

Tucked into this declaration was the determination that both high schools and colleges be standardized as four-year institutions. But the foundation also felt compelled to define "high school preparation." And it settled on "units" of class time in a particular subject as the standard. "Thus, plane geometry, which is usually studied five periods weekly through an academic year, is estimated as one unit," they concluded. To solve the problem of a possible "discrepancy between the amount of work required and the time specified for completion of the work," the foundation determined exactly how many minutes of course time would be required for a given subject. In the end, 14 units of coursework would constitute "the minimum preparation which may be interpreted as 'four years of academic or high-school preparation.'"

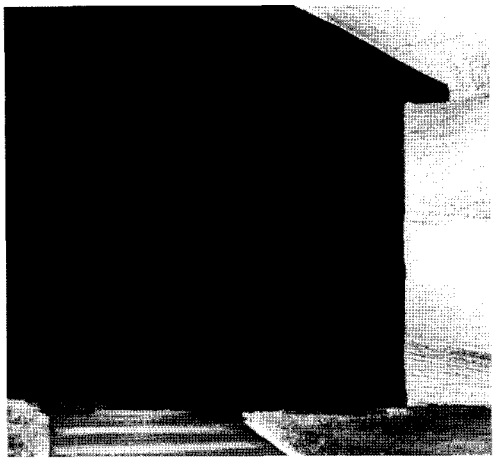
Money Talks

The Carnegie Foundation made the additional decision to require colleges, as a condition of participation in the new pension fund, to accept only students who had completed the designated number of "Carnegie Units." For most of the 20th century, the near-universal definition of a high-school education has been the completion of 14 to 16 units of study: the time-served or seat-time standard. It would be hard to overestimate the impact this definition has had on the structure and organization of America's high schools.

In 1954, the U.S. commissioner of education, Samuel M. Brownell, authorized a study that found the Carnegie Unit was being used "in almost every high school in the country." Why? "In brief," the report concluded, "it was a case of 'money talks.'" To receive pension funds from the Carnegie Foundation's program, colleges had to comply with the foundation's rules. The colleges, in turn, "compelled" the high schools to accept the new definition of college preparation. Thus the unit-credit system came to define both the structure and the meaning of a high-school education: a rigid schedule of subjects and classes, an emphasis on time served rather than amount learned, and a belief that once a student obtained the required number of graduation units, his high-school education was complete.

Barney Brawer is the principal of the Michael J. Perkins Elementary School in Boston. This material was adapted from "Defining and Requiring Academic Achievement," a 2003 study of the history and significance of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Such a hard-core regimen would force many of the "inferior" students to quit school, exactly the opposite of what the country wanted. Put simply, the *Cardinal Principles* proponents believed that requiring all students to follow the same academic course of study *increased* educational inequality. The proposed solution to these problems was curricular differentiation, a policy that allowed students to follow programs and take courses suited to their interests, abilities, and needs.

The Faux Equality of Diversity

It's possible, of course, to see the origins of the fault lines in these early reports as a product of the differences of the perspectives of the people who were on the two committees. While the Committee of Ten membership leaned toward college (in addition to the college presidents, it included two headmasters and a college professor), the Commission for the Reorganization of Secondary Education was dominated by members of the newly emerging profession of education, specifically, professors from schools and colleges of education. Thus focused on high school as an increasingly independent entity, the *Cardinal Principles* team endorsed a new institution, the "comprehensive high school," which would offer students a wide array of curriculum choices.

As we know now, the *Cardinal Principles* team won.

And they won because supporters of comprehensive high schools defined equal education as equal access to different and unequal programs. Guided by the new IQ tests (which did as much as any single thing to convince American educators that tracking was not only possible but preferable) and the rise of guidance and counseling programs (which could match young people with the curriculum track best suited to their "scientifically" determined individual profiles), America entered an era of democratic dumbing down: the equal opportunity to choose (or be chosen for) failing programs. Proponents of comprehensive high schools argued that these curriculum options would encourage increasing numbers of students to stay in school and graduate, already a standard by which to judge high-school effectiveness.

Most American high-school students were still following a college preparatory course of study, though few went on to college: less than 17 percent of 14–17-year-olds graduated from high school.

Unlike the Committee of Ten model, in which all students followed similar college preparatory programs, in the *Cardinal Principles* model equal educational opportunity was achieved because all graduates received the same ultimate credential, a high-school diploma, despite having followed very different education programs and having met very different standards in the process.

Economic Imperatives

By 1920 most big-city high schools in the country were offering four high-school tracks: college preparatory, commercial (which prepared students, mostly young women, for office work), vocational (industrial arts and home economics), and general (which offered a high-school diploma without any specific preparation for future educational or vocational endeavors). But most American high-school students were still following a college preparatory course of study, though few went on to college: less than 17 percent of 14–17-year-olds even graduated from high school. In 1928, for example, more than two-thirds of the classes taken by American high-school students were in the traditional academic areas of English, foreign languages, math, science, and social studies. Industrial arts and home economics, the most widely touted vocational courses, accounted for less than 9 percent of student course taking.

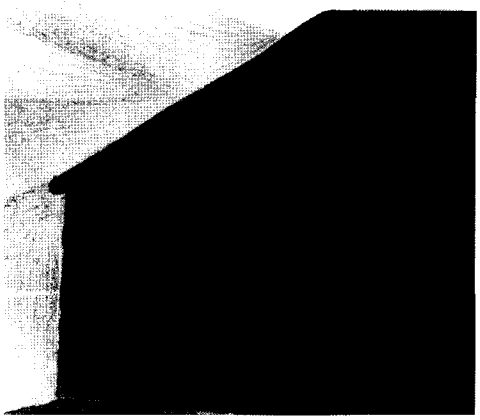
In essence, high schools in this period balanced important aspects of both the Committee of Ten and *Cardinal Principles*. These schools maintained strong academic programs, but they also offered enough vocational and elective courses for students to have some curricular choice. In effect, the nation's urban high schools, which served increasing numbers of young people from poor and immigrant families, were arguably providing the best academic and, for a smaller number of students, vocational education available in the United States at that time.

Unfortunately, this situation changed drastically in the 1930s. The collapse of the national economy, particularly the collapse of the youth labor market, forced a huge number of adolescents back to school. By 1940, 7,123,009 students between the ages of 14 and 17 were in high school, more than 73 percent of the age group. Amid this unprecedented

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enrollment surge (an increase of some 2.3 million students over 1930), education leaders once again argued that the intellectual abilities of the new high-school entrants were weaker than those of previous groups of students; and these new students needed access to less-demanding courses. L. A. Williams, an education professor from the University of California–Berkeley, wrote in a 1944 book that most American high-school students of the era were simply "incapable of learning so-called liberal subjects." These education leaders reiterated their belief that a rigorous regimen of courses would force many of the new students to drop out, a dreadful prospect during the Great Depression.

The economic crisis and the resulting enrollment boom combined to produce a profoundly important shift in the nature and function of high schools. Increasingly, their task was custodial, to keep students *out of* the adult world (that is, out of the labor market) instead of preparing them for it. As a result, educators channeled increasing numbers of students into undemanding, nonacademic courses, while lowering standards in the academic courses that were required for graduation. Though justified by claims that these curriculum changes increased equal opportunity of education, in reality they had a grossly *un*equal impact on white working-class young people and the growing number of black students who entered high schools in the 1930s and 1940s. These students were disproportionately assigned to nonacademic tracks (particularly the general track) and watered-down academic courses.



The Great Depression produced a profoundly important shift in the nature and function of high schools. Increasingly, their task was custodial, to keep students *out* of the market instead of preparing them for it.

The Hell of Democratic Intentions

As David Angus and I discovered in researching our book on the history of the American high school (*The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890–1995*), these curriculum policy changes led to changes in student course taking. Between 1928 and 1934, academic course taking dropped from 67 percent to slightly more than 62 percent. The most telling aspect of that shift: Health and Physical Education (PE) courses increased from 4.9 to 11.5 percent of total course taking nationwide. These courses were entertaining, relevant to young people's lives outside of school, required little or no homework, and, for PE, were amenable to high student/teacher ratios.

Over the next half century health and PE was the fastest-growing segment of course taking. By 1973 it was second only to English in the percent of student course taking nationwide.

As these less-demanding, nonintellectual courses proliferated, a new "movement" was born, the Life Adjustment Movement, a federally sponsored curriculum reform effort that began soon after World War II. According to Charles Prosser, the father of Life Adjustment, only 20 percent of American young people could master academic content; another 20 percent were capable of doing vocational subjects; and the remaining 60 percent needed courses in subjects like health and PE, effective use of leisure time, driver training, and knowledge of such "problems of American democracy" as dating, buying on credit, and renting an apartment.

Stimulated by the Life Adjustment Movement, the dilution of the high-school curriculum continued apace. In 1928 nonacademic courses accounted for about 33 percent of the classes taken by U.S. high-school students; by 1961 that number had increased to 43 percent. One stunning fact puts into perspective this dramatic growth of the nonacademic segment of the curriculum: in 1910 the share of high-school work devoted to *each* of the five basic academic subjects (English, foreign language, mathematics, science, and history) enrolled more students than *all* of the nonacademic courses combined; by 1982, more than 39 percent of all high-school coursework was in nonacademic subjects.

Despite the sharp decline in the share of academic course taking, indeed, *because* of this decline, education leaders in the 1940s and 1950s declared that significant progress was being made toward equal opportunity for education. Pointing to growing high-school enrollments and graduation rates as evidence of the success of their policies, education leaders reiterated that getting diplomas in the hands of more students was far more egalitarian than having all students educated in discipline-based subject matter.

Still, as early as the late 1940s, researchers were discovering high correlations between track placements and social

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

class. And by 1961, a study of the Detroit public schools found that students from the poorest families in the district were eight times more likely to be in the general track than children from upper-income families.

As the cold war bore down on the nation, this transformation of the high school from a ladder to success into a vast warehouse for youth should have alarmed many Americans. Indeed, in the 1950s some critics, most notably University of Illinois historian Arthur Bestor, denounced these trends, claiming that they had turned high schools into "educational wastelands." But educators gave little heed to such criticism.

Part of the reason for this complacency lay in the apparent success of the curriculum reforms, a success defined more by quantity than by quality. Between 1950 and 1970, the number of students in grades 9 through 12 more than doubled, from 6,397,000 to 14,337,000, from 76.1 to 92.2 percent of 14–17-year-olds. Citing these enrollment increases, defenders of the comprehensive high school, primarily school superintendents and professors in schools and colleges of education, declared that the institution was functioning well. Clearly, they argued, the relevant, less-demanding curriculum was attracting larger numbers of students and keeping them in school longer. As one education leader in Detroit put it, "We are trying to keep the dropout rate down and keep youngsters in school as long as possible by offering interesting, attractive, and constructive courses." They did not consider that the decline of the youth labor market, which had begun in the 1930s, may have been a far more powerful "push" on increasing high-school enrollments than the "pull" of easier courses and watered-down graduation requirements.

The percentages of student course taking in academic subjects continued to fall. Between 1928 and 1973, foreign language course taking across the country plunged from 9.5 percent to 3.9 percent. Mathematics dropped from 12.8 to 9.2 percent. Moreover, during these years, the number and percentage of students taking low-level math courses such as "refresher mathematics" increased.

Indeed, there were dramatic increases in the percentages of students taking less-demanding courses in all areas. Put simply, by the early 1960s, most students in American high schools were getting, at best, a second-rate education compared with that of the generation before them.

Slouching toward Anti-Intellectualism

Compounding the impact of these trends was the emergence of a new phenomenon related to the dominant presence of high schools in the lives of young Americans, the development of what sociologist James Coleman called "the adolescent society." In his now-classic 1961 study *The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and Its Impact on Education* (for excerpts, see p. 40), Coleman identified a series of problems that resulted from the separate society that high school had created for teenagers. Most troublesome, he said, was that within the new adolescent society peer groups often superseded adult authority in shaping behavior.

Not surprisingly, the young people who set the standards for their peers were those with athletic prowess, good looks, and winsome personalities, not those who devoted the most time and energy to doing well in school. In a sense, the rise of this important peer group dovetailed nicely with the changes that educators had introduced in high schools over the previous 30 years: namely, downplaying the role of academic subjects and promoting the subjects and activities that appealed to teenage interests and lifestyles. The confluence of institutional and cultural anti-intellectualism, which was incessantly reinforced by similar messages in films, television, and music, would bedevil American high schools for the rest of the century.

This drift toward increasing anti-intellectualism did not go entirely unchallenged. In October 1957, following the launch of Sputnik, criticism of high schools became front-page news, spurring a high-profile debate about problems of secondary education. Even though this debate coincided with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), designed to stimulate interest in math, science, and foreign languages, the percentage of students taking foreign language and math courses actually fell slightly between 1961 and 1973.

Throughout these years, education leaders effectively defended the comprehensive high school, declaring time and again that demanding greater academic courses for all students would lead to a wave of dropouts and, thus, to greater education inequality. In 1959, another Harvard president, this one retired, James Conant, published a widely cited study that seemed to validate these views. Conant concluded that American high schools were sound and that the differentiated high-school curriculum was the key to secondary schools' fulfilling their democratic mission. The Conant report, *The American High School Today*, effectively ended the debate about the quality of American high schools for the next two decades.

Today it seems surprising that Sputnik and the NDEA had so little impact on education. But equally remarkable is the modest influence of the major social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite loud demands for greater education equality, access to first-rate college preparatory programs for large numbers of minority students remains an unrealized goal. Before the 1950s, most young black people, particularly those in the South, had few opportunities for any high-school education. But despite a series of unanimous Supreme Court decisions meant to reverse this trend, in the ensuing years large numbers of black students failed to gain access to the best programs the newly integrated schools offered. Indeed, in many large cities during the 1960s and 1970s, the problems facing minority high-school

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

students actually worsened, as their schools became battlegrounds for such issues as busing and identity politics, issues that overwhelmed more routine efforts to improve the quality of education.

Given these developments, it was not surprising that academic course-taking patterns of high-school students nationwide barely changed between 1961 and 1973, increasing about 2 percentage points. A number of new education policies contributed to this stability in course taking and to the declining quality of high-school education. First, many one-semester courses, designed to be highly relevant, differed widely in rigor and content, ranging from potentially substantive courses in areas such as African American literature to trendy offerings like "Rock Poetry."

Second, school leaders began giving academic credit for various aspects of the extracurriculum, such as providing English credit for students working on the school newspaper or yearbook. Such actions further diminished the role that academic courses played in high-school education.

Third, educators began giving credit toward graduation for such courses as Consumer Math, Refresher Math, and Shop Math, watered-down material that had not previously satisfied a graduation requirement. In other words, even when the share of math course taking rose, the increases were coming largely from students taking less-demanding math courses, not algebra, geometry, trigonometry, or calculus.

Finally, but most important, during the 1960s and 1970s educators gradually shifted the onus of course and program selection away from guidance counselors and other education professionals and onto students and their parents. This policy greatly expanded student choice and clearly fit into the counterculture zeitgeist. It also enabled educators to duck accusations that *they* were responsible for reproducing inequality, since course and program selection now rested with students and their parents rather than with educators.

Back to the Future

By making choice the driving force behind high-school programs, as Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen noted in *The Shopping Mall High School* (1985), the schools came to resemble education shopping malls, with students searching for bargains (that is, courses that were easy, relevant, and satisfied graduation requirements).

In some ways, the 1970s mark the low point of high-school development in the United States. A small percentage of students got a reasonably good education, but most adolescents drifted through their high-school years unchallenged and uninspired.

The Reagan administration's 1983 manifesto, *A Nation at Risk*, gave voice to those who questioned this education pall. It also reintroduced several key ideas from the report of the Committee of Ten, which assumed that academic courses had greater education value than other courses. *A Nation at Risk* decried the "cafeteria style curriculum" of American high schools, rejecting curricular differentiation, the animating idea of *Cardinal Principles*.

By 1986, 45 states and the District of Columbia had raised high-school graduation requirements, 42 had increased math requirements, and 34 had boosted science requirements. These changes reduced the choices that students could make in their course selections and thus marked a dramatic shift away from the policies of the previous half-century.

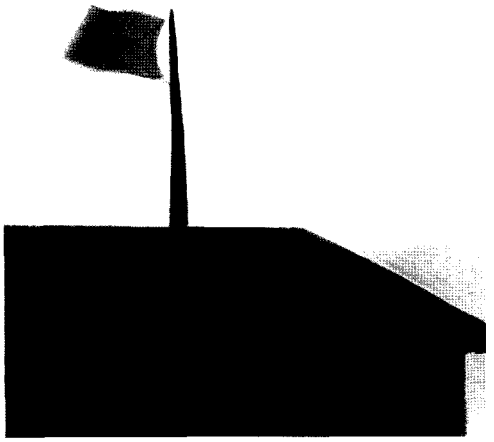
They also produced the most substantial changes in student course taking since the 1930s. In 1982, for example, only 31.5 percent of all high-school graduates took four years of English, three years of social studies, and two years each of math and science. By 1994, however, the number of graduates who followed that regimen of courses had shot up to 74.6 percent. Even more impressive was the fact that the percentages for African American (76.7) and Latino (77.5) graduates were greater than for whites (75.5). These changes were positive steps away from curricular differentiation and toward greater curricular equality.

Unfortunately, despite these changes in high-school course taking over the past two decades, student achievement in core liberal-arts courses has not shown dramatic improvement, and American students have repeatedly fallen short on international comparisons of achievement, particularly in math and science. The most recent findings from the Long-Term Trend Reading and Mathematics Assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) illuminate this situation clearly. Despite substantially more high-school students taking more difficult mathematics courses between 1978 and 2004, the overall mathematics scores for 17-year-olds in that period remained unchanged. Similarly, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) recently released data comparing mathematical literacy and problem-solving skills for 15-year-olds in 39 developed countries: American students ranked 27th. As one commentator on the NAEP findings put it, we are facing "a deepening crisis in the nation's high schools."

The broad outlines of this crisis have been apparent for many years. High schools have been "selling students short" for decades, offering too many options and too many watered-down courses. They have sustained a culture of low expectations on both sides of the teacher's desk.

Reforming our high schools should begin by going back to the future. The vision for American high schools articulated by the Committee of Ten in 1893 must inspire the reforms for our high schools in the 21st century. Clearly, returning to a curriculum model akin to that of the Committee of Ten is necessary but not sufficient to improve the quality of high-school education. What else is needed?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



What We Can Do

First, we must effectively address the education problems of schools from preschool through 8th grade. High schools rest on the foundation set in the early grades. If 9th graders enter high school reading at a 6th-grade level, their prospects for success in a challenging high school would be precarious at best. With its emphasis on improving reading and mathematics skills, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) can have a powerful positive influence on preparing young people for high-quality secondary education.

We must also ensure that students entering secondary schools know more than just reading and math. In a troubling example of unintended consequences, because of NCLB elementary teachers may be tempted to set aside units on history, science, or literature in order to create more time for reading and math instruction. The result of such actions will be disastrous for high schools, as students enter with little or none of the crucial background they need to master the subjects they will be required to take on the secondary level. Again, the elementary grades must provide the *disciplinary* foundations for future learning in core subject areas.

Teachers at all levels need additional preparation in the subjects that they teach and how to teach them. Beyond the fact that large numbers of high-school teachers are teaching subjects in which they have neither a major nor a minor, even teachers who do have strong academic credentials are often clueless about how to teach their subjects to students from diverse backgrounds and abilities. Historically, as we have seen, school leaders "solved" this problem by assigning supposedly less able students to the general or vocational tracks and watering down the courses they took. This process eliminated the need for teachers to do the hard work of developing methods that would make challenging content accessible to all students. Schools of education are equally culpable in this process, having shirked their obligation to do the kind of research that would aid administrators and teachers in implementing intellectually rich programs for all students. Programs to prepare new teachers and professional development programs for practicing teachers must address these problems if American education is to improve and thrive.

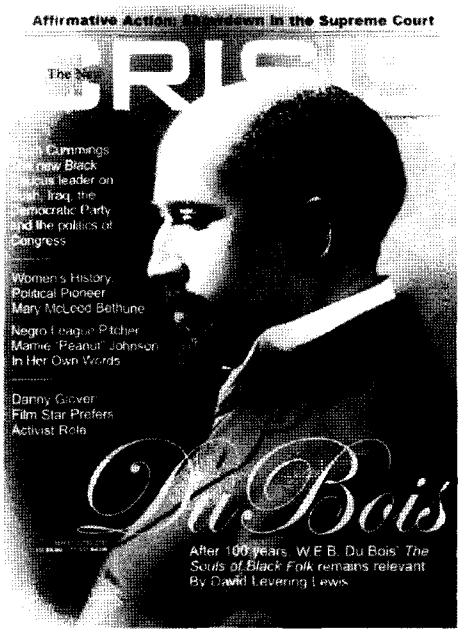
People who advocate more vocational education in our high schools miss the most fundamental fact of the new world we are living in: today, the best vocational education is academic education.

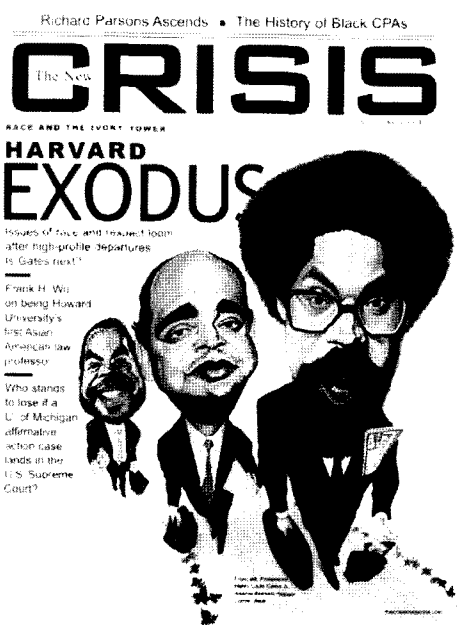
Finally, we must avoid reform efforts that hide curricular differentiation under an assumed name. This may be the legacy of the most popular high-school reform of the day: subdividing large high schools into small units serving about 500 students. There is certainly much to commend this idea, especially its effort to reduce the anonymity and alienation many students experience in high schools with enrollments of 2,000 or more. But recent research by sociologists Douglas Ready and Valerie Lee (of the University of Oregon and University of Michigan, respectively) found that the new arrangements simply re-created the differentiated curricula of the old system. Students now attended small schools within schools, each with a new name and mission, but the courses and education expectations were essentially the same as those of the tracking regime in the old, larger high school.

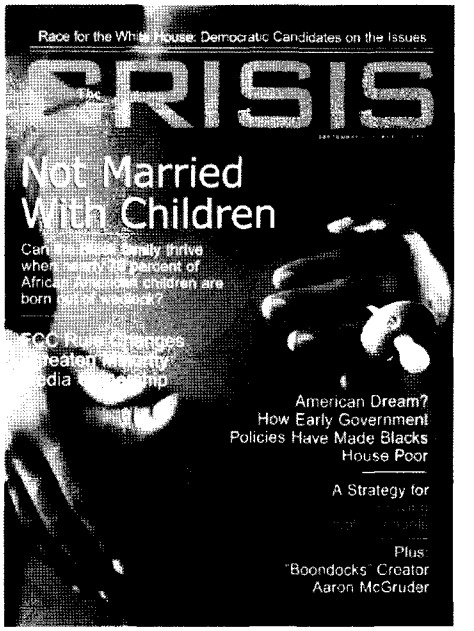
Curricular differentiation has proved to be a protean beast. The first step toward its defeat must be, as the Committee of Ten recognized more than 110 years ago, having *all* high-school students follow an intellectually rich liberal arts course of study. Given the social, political, and economic complexities of the modern world, high-school students need a broad, deep, liberal arts education that will enable them to meet the challenges of the future as informed, thoughtful adults. This means that American young people must graduate with first-rate knowledge, understanding, and skills in foreign languages, mathematics, the sciences, American history and civics, world history and cultures, and great literature from every part of the globe. People who advocate more vocational education in our high schools miss the most fundamental fact of the new world we are living in: today, the best vocational education is academic education.

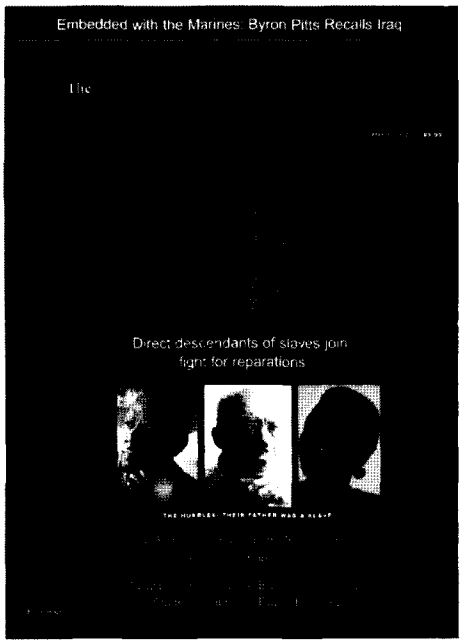
Jeffrey Mirel is professor of educational studies and history, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is the author of The Rise and Fall of an Urban School System: Detroit, 1907–81, *and, with David Angus,* The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890–1995.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




Richard Parsons Ascends • The History of Black CPAs
The New CRISIS
RACE AND THE IVORY TOWER
HARVARD
EXODUS
Issues of race and tenure loom after high-profile departures
Is Gates next?
Frank H. Wu on being Howard University's first Asian American law professor
Who stands to lose if a U. of Michigan affirmative action case lands in the U.S. Supreme Court?

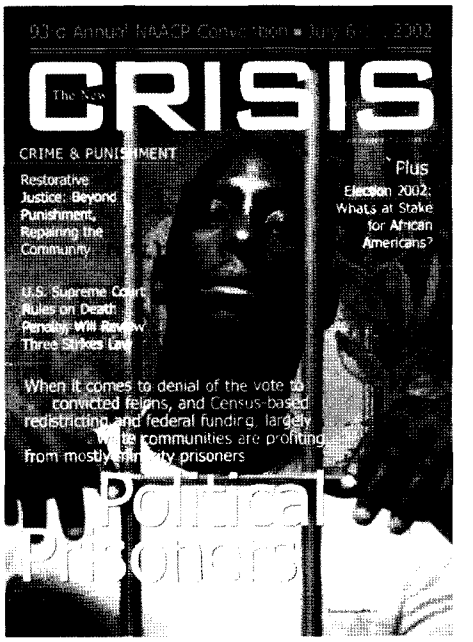




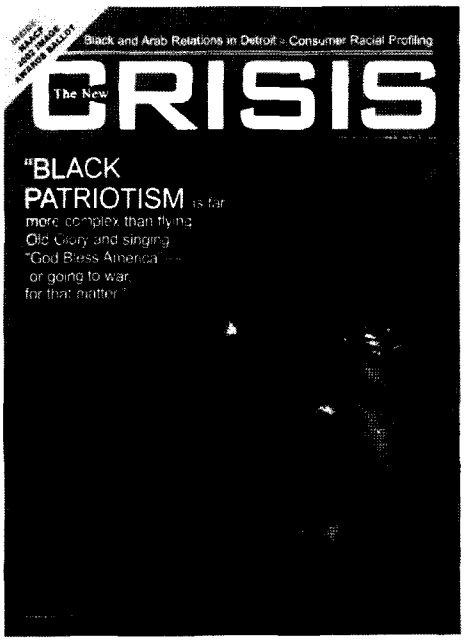
Who knows your heritage?
Who knows the issues that count?
Who speaks to YOU?

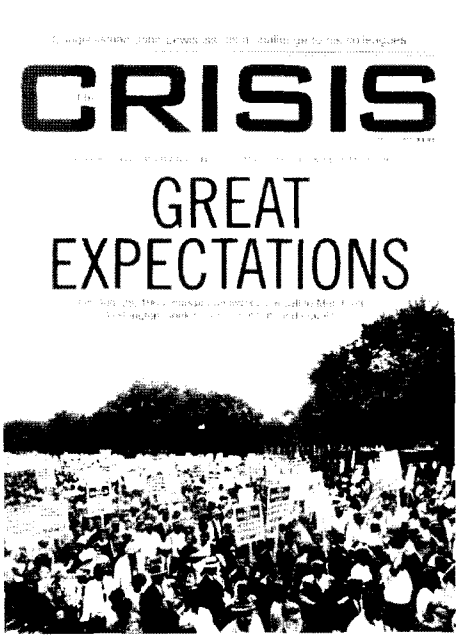
The CRISIS

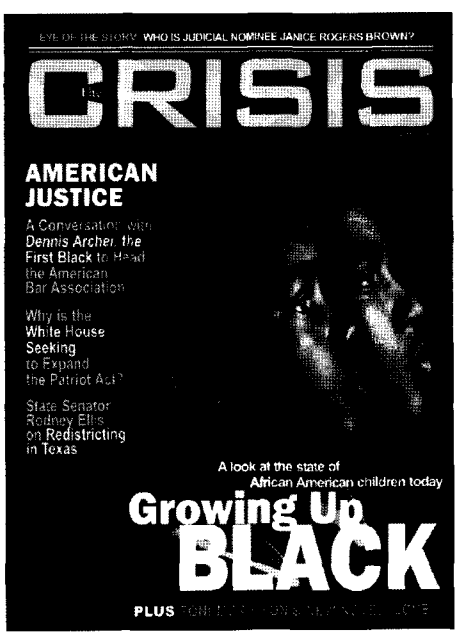
Get your subscription today!
Call 410.580.5138
or order online at
www.thecrisismagazine.com



Find The CRISIS at:
Borders · Barnes and Noble · Hastings Entertainment · College Bookstores · Delta Shuttle


Black and Arab Relations in Detroit • Consumer Racial Profiling
The New CRISIS
"BLACK
PATRIOTISM is far
more complex than flying
Old Glory and singing
"God Bless America" —
or going to war,
for that matter."





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A "COMPREHENSIVE" Problem

THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN FANTASY AND REALITY

BY JAY P. GREENE

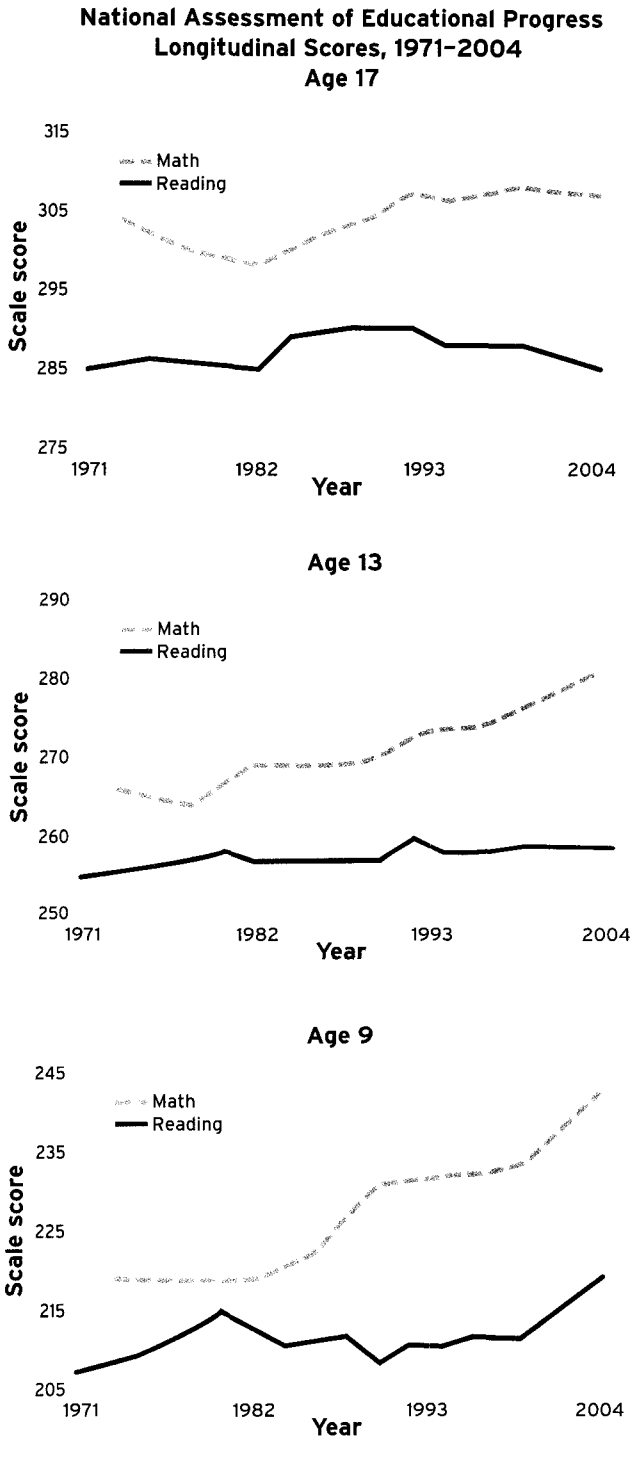
To say that improving high-school student achievement is like turning a supertanker around would be an insult to the speed and maneuverability of supertankers. Whether one looks at standardized test scores, at graduation rates, or at college admission test results, American high-school performance has hardly budged over the past three decades.

This stagnation is not for lack of trying. We have poured more money into schools, hired an army of new teachers to reduce class size, expanded professional development, and retained more experienced teachers—everything that the teacher unions have in mind when they repeat their mantra that we know what works and just need the resources to do it. We have doubled per-pupil spending (after adjusting for inflation) over the past three decades. We reduced the student-teacher ratio in high schools from 21.7 students per teacher in 1960 to 19.8 in 1970, and, by 1999, to 14.1. The percentage of teachers holding master's or doctoral degrees has more than doubled, from 27.5 percent in 1971 to 56.8 percent in 2001. The average teacher in 2001 had 14 years of experience compared with 8 years of experience in 1971.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

High Schoolers Tread Water (Figure 1)

While 9-year-olds seem to keep scoring higher in math and reading, 17-year-olds have made almost no progress in three decades of testing.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

But none of it has worked.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the average 17-year-old today is no more proficient at reading or mathematics than his counterpart in 1970 (see Figure 1). Some progress has been made by our 9- and 13-year-olds, but the gains evaporate by the time these students reach the end of their K–12 experience. The average 17-year-old student's score on the NAEP reading test was 285 in 2004, exactly the same as in 1971. Math results are no different, going from a score of 304 in 1973 to 307 in 2004, a change that is not statistically significant.

This lack of advancement is more disappointing considering how low the achievement bar has been. Only about one in four of the high-school graduates who took the American College Testing (ACT) program's college-readiness test last year met the benchmarks in reading comprehension, English, math, and science. The organization, founded in 1959, called it a "College Readiness Crisis" last year; this year the scores were "unchanged.... Students graduate from high school ready or not." And according to the standards established by NAEP, they're not: 64 percent of 12th graders performed below the proficient level on NAEP's most recent reading test; more than a quarter read at less than what NAEP deemed a "basic" level. On the most recent administration of the NAEP math test, a striking 83 percent of 12th graders scored below the proficient level, and 35 percent scored below the basic level. On the most recent NAEP science test, 82 percent of 12th graders performed below the proficient level, and 47 percent scored below the basic level.

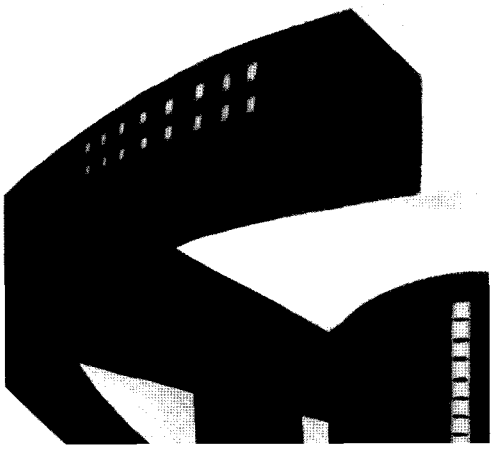
The gloomy picture painted by the ACT and NAEP is confirmed by high-school graduation statistics and college entrance test results. According to the U.S. Department of Education's *Digest of Education Statistics*, just 72 percent of students graduated from high school with a regular diploma in 2002, compared with some 77 percent in 1970. More alarming is the fact that almost half of the students who do graduate are essentially ineligible to go on to a four-year college because they have not taken the minimal coursework needed to apply to virtually any four-year institution. While SAT scores are not particularly useful for long-term analyses of high-school performance because they include only a limited and changing pool of students, they do tell us something about the elite group that does pursue higher education. Even among this population achievement has not been improving. SAT scores in reading dropped from 537 in 1970 to 507 in 2003. Math SAT scores have inched up from 512 in 1970 to 519 in 2003. The lack of improvement among the college-bound elite is more evidence that the stagnation in high-school achievement is not concentrated among the most disadvantaged students.

The problems with our high schools are chronic, widespread, and painfully obvious.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Doing What Doesn't Work

What is not so obvious is what to do to fix the problems. We have significantly increased per-pupil spending, hired an army of additional teachers, and greatly increased the formal training those teachers have received. In short, we have focused considerable energy on increasing the resources available for education. But we have not improved the motivation of administrators and educators to use those resources effectively. Attending to resources without attending to motivation is like filling a race car with fuel and then putting an infant behind the wheel. You just won't go anywhere.



The problem isn't lack of resources. The problem is that we don't think about high schools correctly. We lump them with elementary schools, part of the K-12 system, rather than with colleges, with which they have much more in common.

The problem isn't lack of resources. The problem is that we don't think about high schools correctly. We lump them with elementary schools, part of the K–12 system, rather than with colleges, with which they have much more in common. By so organizing and conceptualizing high schools, we underemphasize the need to provide secondary-school educators with incentives that are more like the incentives of their closer relative, college. The high schools that we created in the 20th century—big, sprawling, "comprehensive"—are not like elementary and preschools. They are not natural extensions of families, and their teachers and administrators should not be expected to act as if they were members of a family.

If parents fall short in raising their children, we generally assume, it has more to do with resources, time, knowledge, or experience than with motivation. We similarly assume that teachers aren't motivated by external rewards or punishments, but by their love of the students. Such thinking is why elementary- and secondary-school reform focuses almost exclusively on resources (per pupil spending), time (class size), knowledge (professional development), or experience (teacher retention) and relatively little on incentives to make educators perform better.

Even if elementary schools can be run effectively like big families, it is unlikely that most high schools, with more than 1,000 students, could be. They are just too big, the kids are not cuddly enough, and the skills that have to be conveyed to students are too complicated. Unless they are made dramatically smaller, high schools have to be run more like professional organizations or businesses and less like families.

The Gates Foundation Strategies

This logic is why the new wave of high school reform efforts, led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (see "A Foundation Goes to School," p. 44), has focused on the disconnect between the reality of big, modern high schools and our fantasy of them as extensions of the family. Gates has addressed this disconnect with various strategies. For example, they have pushed to reduce the size of public high schools, in the belief that small high schools, like families, can succeed by developing a strong, shared sense of mission among faculty and students. In small high schools, the theory goes, the motivation of educators, like the motivation of parents, is buttressed by strong informal bonds between everyone. Whether this theory is producing results is unclear at this point as we do not yet have a large amount of rigorous evidence on the effects of reducing high-school size. But the strategy clearly is to make high schools as small as many elementary schools so that they will acquire more family-like qualities.

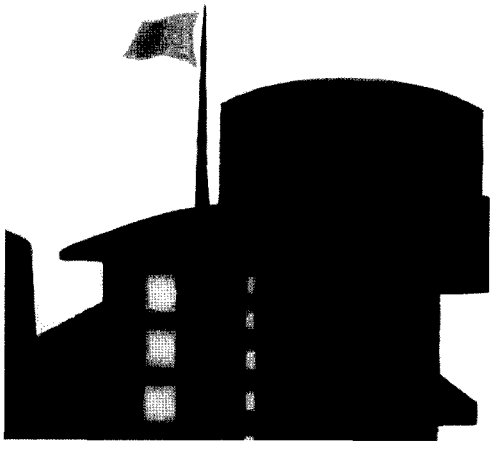
Another strategy, also promoted by the Gates Foundation, is to make high schools more like colleges. These "early-college" high schools do not coddle their students like elementary schools do. They have open campuses, they offer a broad set of electives, and they employ college faculty. For the most part, the Gates early-college initiative focuses on the motivation of students, hoping that greater autonomy and more challenging material will help keep them engaged and interested in school.

But the early-college idea also highlights the importance of altering the motivation of staff. Colleges devise explicit systems of rewards and sanctions to enhance motivation. Unlike public high schools, colleges do not pay faculty solely on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

basis of years of experience and degrees held. Colleges generally attempt to measure the merit of faculty by tracking grant dollars generated, counting the number of publications produced, and administering teacher evaluations, among other criteria. Pay is determined, at least in part, by these performance evaluations. Faculty compensation in college, unlike public high school, is also influenced by market demand for those faculty members, so people in some fields are paid significantly more than others and outside offers are sometimes matched. While colleges, like high schools, offer their faculty members tenure, their evaluation of faculty productivity tends to be much more rigorous.

To be sure, colleges fall far short of optimal efficiency and operate in a regulated and subsidized environment that provides them with financial incentives to neglect students in favor of research. But the somewhat better attention to merit incentives in colleges has helped make our higher education system the envy of the world, while our K–12 public schools, almost entirely lacking external incentives, are not.



Assigning a failing grade to a school as a result of high-stakes testing may be politically embarrassing, but it usually has no effect on school budgets and almost never has any meaningful consequences for individual teachers.

Focusing on Motivation

Families are not impervious to incentives, but those incentives are shaped by informal bonds more than by explicit systems of rewards and sanctions. Even modern organizations, such as businesses or universities, evoke familial incentives as part of their efforts to motivate staff, using terms like "our corporate family," sending out employee newsletters that read like family holiday letters, and going on "retreats" as if they were family vacations. Of course, businesses do not rely solely, or even mainly, on familial incentives; K–12 schools do.

Unfortunately, public high schools have barely begun to tap nonfamilial incentives to motivate their staff. Many high schools have begun to administer high-stakes tests, which collect some information on outcomes and offer some rewards and sanctions for productivity. But the measures of outcomes are limited, the rewards and sanctions are weak, and individual employees are largely unaffected by these incentives. Assigning a failing grade to a school as a result of high-stakes testing may be politically embarrassing, but it usually has no effect on school budgets and almost never has any meaningful consequences for individual teachers.

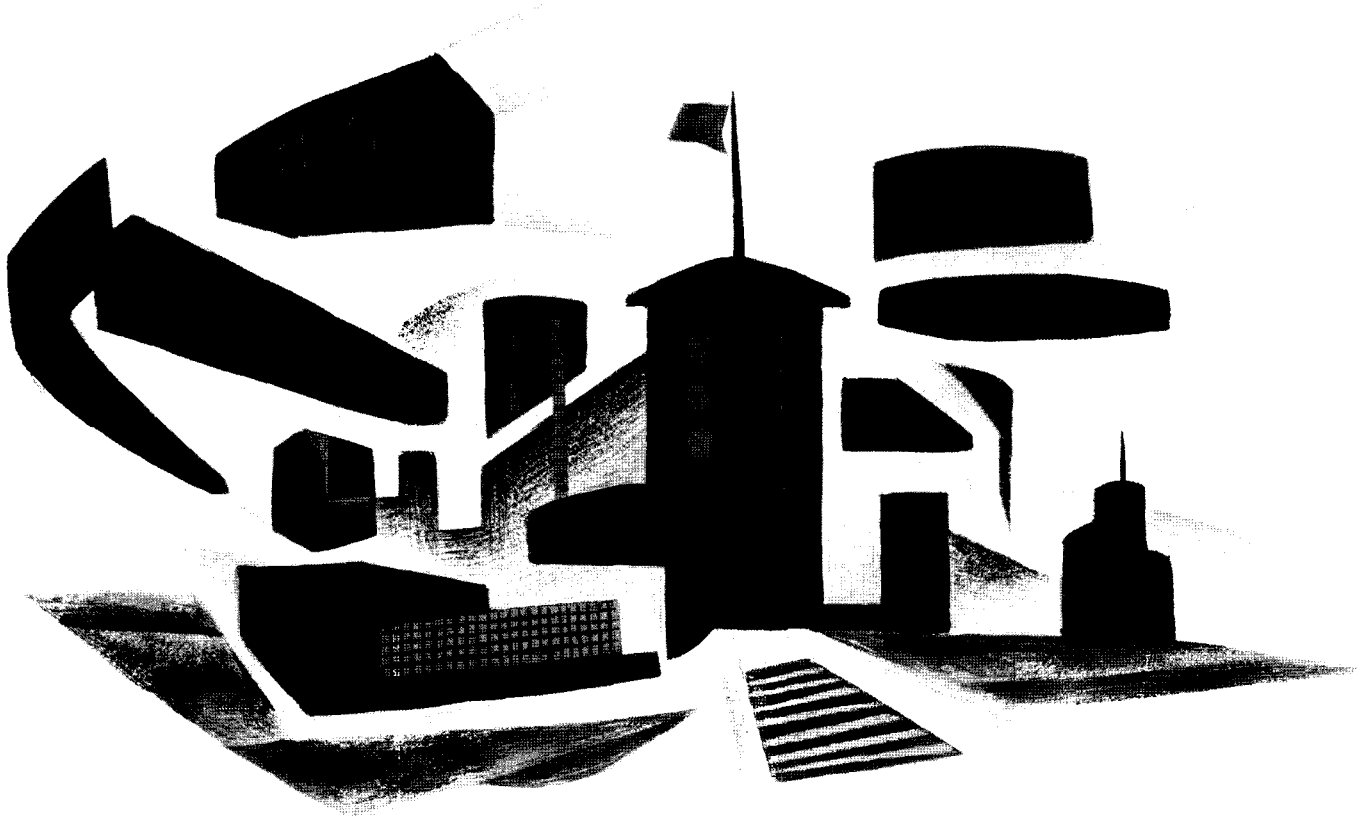
The lack of choice and competition among high schools is at the heart of the problem. In particular, if high schools have to compete for their students and revenues because of vouchers or charter schools, they will figure out how best to motivate their staff to improve quality and attract students. Some high schools will adopt their own high-stakes testing systems to measure and reward productivity. Other high schools may decide that they can motivate their staff best by reducing size and by increasing the familial incentives of their organization. The variety of arrangements to motivate staff to successfully compete is impossible to fully anticipate or describe.

The point is that the market incentives that vouchers and charter schools can bring to high schools will focus school leadership on the problem of motivation. Those leaders will no longer be able to maintain the fantasy of high-school educators floating from classroom to classroom like Mary Poppins because of their love of children while at the same time haggling over pay, benefits, and working conditions as if they were automobile workers. Either high schools will really have to embrace family incentives by becoming significantly smaller and more informal, or they will have to admit that they are large, modern organizations that require explicit systems of rewards and sanctions to enhance productivity. Either way, they need competition to force them to address the issues of motivation and improvement.

Jay P. Greene is professor of education reform, University of Arkansas, and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. He is author, most recently, of Education Myths: What Special-Interest Groups Want You to Believe about Our Schools—And Why It Isn't So.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THINGS ARE Falling Apart



CAN THE CENTER FIND A SOLUTION THAT WILL HOLD?

BY CHESTER E. FINN JR.

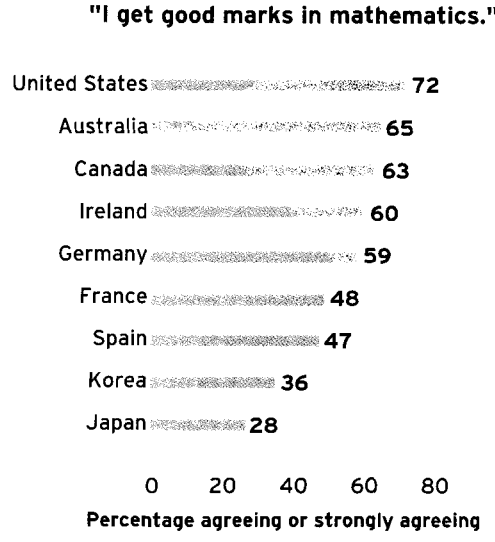
The year 2005 began with high schools taking center stage in Washington's continuing drama concerning education reform. President George W. Bush started things off in January, when he delivered a ringing address at a suburban D.C. high school about the urgency of reforming American high schools and offered a bold $1.5 billion plan for doing so. A month after the presidential call to arms for high-school reform, 45 governors and a host of education leaders and CEOs met in a downtown Washington, D.C., hotel for a summit devoted to the subject.

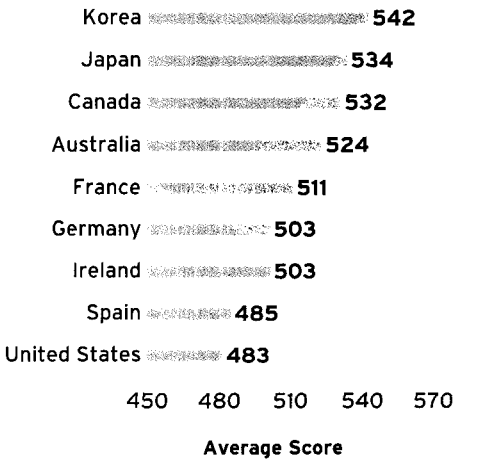
In his keynote address to that gathering, Microsoft chairman Bill Gates pronounced current U.S. high schools "obsolete" and said, "Even when they are working as designed, they cannot teach all our students what they need to know today." At the same conclave, the new secretary of education, Margaret Spellings, declared that America "must make a high-school diploma a ticket to success in the 21st century." The summit concluded by adopting a five-part state "action agenda": restoring value to the diploma; redesigning the high school as an institution; strengthening the quality of high-school teachers and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Slow-Pitch Softball (Figure 1)

Although 15-year-olds from the United States scored near the bottom in mathematics on the recent Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, the American test-takers ranked number one on the test's self-esteem index.





Note: Scores were reported for 39 countries in PISA 2003. The above figures depict the United States, which ranked 27th in math, and a sample of eight countries with average mathematics literacy scores higher than those of the United States.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Learning for Tomorrow's World—First Results from PISA 2003"

principals; holding high schools accountable for their results; and streamlining "education governance."

With all these powerful people talking high-school reform, it seemed that the planets had aligned to make high schools, the lost child of public education, the featured attraction on the U.S. education-policy agenda. But the universe then began to shift and the planets were knocked out of alignment. First, House Education Committee chairman John Boehner, a Republican from Ohio and longtime proponent of education reform, expressed doubts about the federal government's role in leading the high-school reform effort. "The current system," Boehner remarked at a late-May committee hearing, "isn't getting the job done. But that doesn't necessarily mean the solution to the problem should be driven from Washington." Another senior member of that committee, former Delaware governor Michael Castle, also a Republican, was blunter. "Frankly," he said, "there's political opposition to it, and it's not just Democrats. It's within the Republican Party as well." And on the other side of the Capitol a spokesman for Senator Mike Enzi, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, noted, "Senator Enzi has made several other education issues the first priority."

As if that weren't trouble enough, the president's $1.5 billion plan entailed shifting to his high-school reform plan funds traditionally spent on vocational education, a move that riled many members of Congress since "voc ed" remains popular back home.

What happened? Has the White House initiative been stopped at the starting gate? Is high-school reform a dead issue?

The Need Is Great, the Political Will Weak

As nearly everyone in education knows, something is wrong with our high schools. And, for the most part, the Bush administration's proposal seemed built on that consensus, much the same accord that brought us No Child Left Behind and the determination that schools need a regimen of standards, testing, and accountability.

"Out of a hundred 9th graders in our public schools," said Mr. Bush in his January speech, "only 68 will complete high school on time. Now, we live in a competitive world, and a 68 percent graduation rate for 9th graders is not good enough to be able to compete in this competitive world. In math and science, the problem is especially urgent. A recent study showed that American 15-year-olds ranked 27th out of 39 countries in math literacy. I don't know about you, but I want to be ranked first in the world, not 27th." (See Figure 1.)

The president proposed a series of programs to help high-school students graduate with "skills necessary to succeed." The plan included money to identify at-risk 8th graders and intervene in their academic lives "before it's too late." But the centerpiece was a call for tests in reading and math in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. "Testing at high-school levels will help us to become more competitive as the years go by," said Bush. "Testing in high schools will make sure that our children are employable for the jobs of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

21st century. Testing will allow teachers to improve their classes. Testing will enable schools to track. Testing will make sure that a diploma is not merely a sign of endurance, but the mark of a young person ready to succeed."

The plan seemed sensible enough. And it is possible, of course, that parts of the president's plan could reemerge when No Child Left Behind is reauthorized. At present, though, Congress seems to think it has done plenty to make over K–12 education and is loath to extend NCLB's scope at the very time that the ambitious statute is facing so many implementation challenges as well as so much opposition from states and districts. Indeed, the controversies surrounding NCLB have at least delayed, if not doomed, both the administration's version of high-school reform and any other bold federal entry into that territory.

Remember the warning of the French political commentator, George Bernanos: "The worst, the most corrupting of lies, are problems poorly stated."

Maximum Feasible Myopia

The real question, then, though perhaps born of necessity, is whether it's such a bad thing that responsibility for revitalizing U.S. high schools has been thrust back on states and districts, private funders, and diverse reform architects. Could the federal government's failure to mount a political consensus open the way to useful experimentation with various potential solutions?

Indeed, much experimenting is already under way across the land. And remembering the warning of the French political commentator George Bernanos may enhance the chances of finding useful solutions: "The worst, the most corrupting of lies, are problems poorly stated." In other words, if a problem is misrepresented or its definition is disputed, any given solution is unlikely to solve it to everyone's satisfaction.

A vivid American example of this policy perplexity was embodied in a famous 1969 book, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, by the late senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The title was a play on a key phrase in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (which launched LBJ's "war on poverty") calling for the "maximum feasible participation" of residents and groups affected by the legislation's centerpiece Community Action Program. Moynihan's point was that the program's architects didn't actually agree on what the problem was, so the legislation they created fell apart when the time came for its implementation. It was, if you will, a modern public-policy rendition of the tale of the blind men and the elephant, wherein each sightless man had a different notion of the essential nature of this beast depending on which part he was touching. Moynihan contended that the Community Action Program was doomed because the rush to legislate had led people to reach superficial agreement on the definition of the policy problem.

As America embarks on high-school reform, it runs a similar risk. The nation is awash in different solutions to the high-school problem. But mostly we are still grappling with trying to define the problem. Sure, from 30,000 feet we can reach broad agreement as to what's wrong. Nearly everyone shares the concern of the president and the governors that U.S. high-school students are not learning enough; that they're being surpassed by their peers in other lands; that too many are bored to death; that too many drop out; that few of those who graduate are well prepared for college and employment. And so on. From six miles up, we know we have a problem and can even reach a meeting of minds as to its most vivid manifestations.

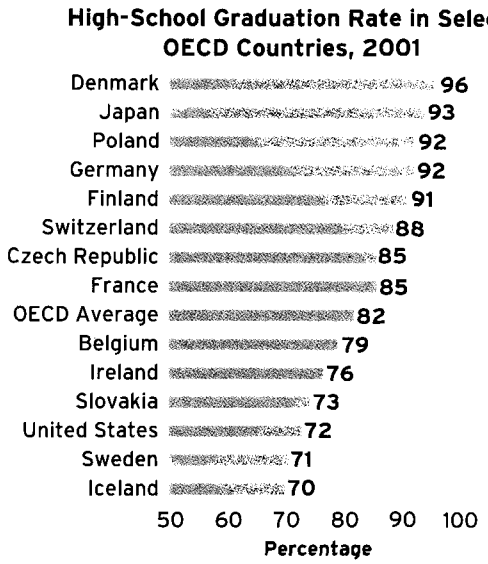
Yes, there's a problem, several problems, in fact, and the rationale for high-school reform would seem compelling. But as we get closer to the ground, the picture loses focus. Is the problem with high school that it is not engaging students or that it is not academically challenging enough? Can we *simultaneously* reduce dropouts and beef up academic achievement? Will stiffer graduation requirements and more high-stakes testing cause even more young people to quit? Are these complementary goals, or are they trade-offs? Are these even the right questions?

One thing we do know is that if we get the answers wrong, we invite a new maximum feasible misunderstanding, and high-school reform will be declared a failure. Thus I sense that it's just as well Uncle Sam is not rushing in with a predetermined, nationwide strategy and that we're giving states, communities, and private organizations some leeway to work out different approaches. If we monitor and evaluate their efforts, we stand to learn more about what works for whom in what circumstances.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Falling Behind (Figure 2)

The U.S. high-school graduation rate is well below that of most other developed countries.



SOURCE: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Education at a Glance 2003"

Knowing What's Wrong

How many options are there, really? Allowing for mixing and matching, I can identify at least six versions of the problem, each giving rise to different theories of action and strategies for solving it. The now-dormant White House proposals tapped into several of these, as did the summit communiqué released by the National Governors Association. At the end of the day, we will likely conclude that the high-school problem is actually a tangle of problems in need of a multipart solution. Well and good. First, though, all the blind men should come to understand the many-faceted nature of this particular beast.

Problem 1:

Achievement is too low.

Solution: Extend standards-based reform to high schools by making them accountable for their students' achievement and completion rates. A number of states have begun to do this, and the Bush proposal is focused here, bringing high schools under the NCLB umbrella, primarily via testing and public accountability. This is a familiar, government-driven, top-down, standards-based, institution-centered approach, already fairly well established in the primary and middle schools.

Problem 2:

Students aren't working hard enough, taking the right courses, or learning enough.

Solution: Since all they need do to get a diploma is go through the motions and rack up the course credits, no real reward follows from studying hard (save for the small fraction seeking entry to competitive colleges), and no unpleasantness results from taking it easy. We thus need to establish high-stakes graduation tests that students must pass to earn their diplomas. This, too, is a behaviorist, top-down, results-based, accountability-driven system, but this version bears down primarily on the kids rather than on their schools. About half the states have already put into place some form of statewide graduation test. Some also supply carrots along with the sticks via positive inducements such as college scholarships for those with B averages. The Bush administration suggested fatter Pell grants for those who complete a challenging curriculum.

Problem 3:

High school is a lockstep bore, and consequently too many kids turn off, tune out, and quit (see Figure 2). If they don't stick around (or come back), there's no way they'll learn.

Solution: Prevent dropouts and maximize completions by making the high-school experience more appealing: individualize it, let students move at their own pace. This was the thrust of a recent task force report in Ohio titled "High-Quality High Schools"; it was the point of the president's proposed $200 million Performance Plan Fund (part of the $1.5 billion initiative); and it's the essence of any number of private-sector initiatives. With it, sometimes, comes the idea of creating new education options for out-of-school youth and dropout recovery programs for those who have fallen by the wayside. (Indeed, we could identify seven reform strategies rather than six by bisecting this one and distinguishing between prevention and retrieval schemes.) The underlying theory of action is that, if young people like school more (and, presumably, succeed at it), they'll hang in there. Well-conceived specialty schools and programs can reengage young people who have already had it with formal education.

Problem 4:

The circa-1950s, one-size-fits-all, comprehensive high school is itself dysfunctional, an inefficient, outmoded vehicle for teaching young people what they need to learn.

Solution: Devise new institutional forms for delivering secondary education, using technology, modern organization theory, and outsourcing. Give young people choices among the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

formats: early-college high schools; smaller schools; schools within schools; charter schools; KIPP schools; high-tech high schools; virtual high schools; and more. Much has been tried on this front, and the innovations take many shapes, as do the schemes whereby young people and their parents can access the version that works best for them.

Problem 5:

The courses are too easy, pointless, and ill matched to the demands of the real world.

Solution: Beef up the curriculum. Broaden access to Advanced Placement courses and propagate the International Baccalaureate. Strengthen state standards. Revise the textbooks. Team up with colleges to create K–16 programs. Make college-prep the default curriculum. Blend higher-education's expectations with those of modern jobs, à la the American Diploma Project, and work backward through the K–12 grades.

Problem 6:

Academic work and intellectual activity are no way to the adolescent heart.

Solution: Since teenagers are animated by things with tangible rewards and sleeves-rolled-up engagement, we need to get practical. Focus on tech-prep programs, ventures that join high schools to community colleges, work-study, schedules that blend school with jobs, voluntarism and community service, and kindred ways of tapping into the "affective," pecuniary, and social sides of young people.

High School Is Different

To be sure, we could slice these strategies differently and combine them in any number of packages. And yes, with a bit of effort they can be loosely grouped under the two familiar headings that we know as standards-based and choice-based reform. But that may not be the most useful way to frame them. Indeed, it may invite people to slip into familiar ideological postures rather than to think closely about high schools.

The fact is that high schools pose challenges distinct from those of K–8. Their students don't really have to be there. Even where state compulsory attendance laws extend to age 17 or 18, our sky-high dropout rate (see Figure 2) proves those statutes are unenforceable. High schools are larger than elementary schools and there are fewer of them, which makes choice-based strategies harder. For every person who believes that the high school's mission is to supply all students with a solid liberal arts education, someone else is convinced that young people's differing tastes and aspirations should preclude uniformity of academic standards and curriculum. On a major national survey conducted in April 2005, for example, 76 percent of Americans opposed making college prep the universal high-school curriculum and instead favored "career/technical education to equip students who don't go to college with real-world skills." (Hence the continuing appeal of voc ed.) By the high-school years, moreover, achievement levels range widely: some students still need basic reading and arithmetic, while others crave university-level coursework and Intel science competitions.

Adolescents also have much on their minds besides school: money, sports, and socializing, for starters. More than a few have tangled with such adult-world problems as drugs, crime, and pregnancy. And many have scant use for authority (or even advice) proffered by grown-ups—their parents, teachers, or anybody else.

As if that did not present a sufficiently daunting picture for would-be reformers, lots of Americans don't really see a big problem with high schools in their present form, at least not with the schools they know best. Parents typically give high marks to their own children's high schools, institutions that also anchor many communities, provide Friday-night football games, and seem to be doing an adequate job of turning out graduates who go on to college, even if some must take remedial courses when they get there. The dropout rate means that the high schools' most acute failures largely vanish from sight. At the top, honors students fret not about boredom or weak achievement, but about the stress that attends all that cramming and homework as they compete for entry into high-status universities. And just about everyone who sticks it out can at least attend the local community college, join the military, or find an entry-level job of some sort. "What, exactly, is the problem with our high school?" ask the residents of River City, U.S.A.

Considering all the impediments to wholesale high-school reform and the absence of true consensus as to the nature and urgency of the problem, I conclude that diversity and experimentation are a reasonable way to proceed in mid-decade, rather than pressing for elusive agreement about a single national strategy. That doesn't mean I'm complacent about today's high schools. They are not, in fact, getting us where we need to go as a country. But neither are they going to be turned around from Washington, which lacks the political will to make this problem its own. Instead, let us welcome the mixing of strategies and matching of solutions, the combining of ideas and refining of programs. Let us try all six (or five or seven) of the aforementioned reform notions and any number of permutations and combinations of them and seek to determine what works best for whom in which circumstances. High-school reform may resemble welfare reform, where it was important that states had the freedom and incentive to try various approaches before the time was ripe for a national strategy.

Let us acknowledge, though, that a decentralized, piecemeal approach invites its own messy confusion, the more so if we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have no common metrics by which to gauge progress, compare results, or define success from one place to another.

Multiple reform strategies cast the greatest light when they at least share measures of performance. For which purpose, let us return to 30,000 feet and suggest that the two essential sets of data for tracking America's progress or lack thereof in revitalizing the high school are objective test scores and graduation rates.

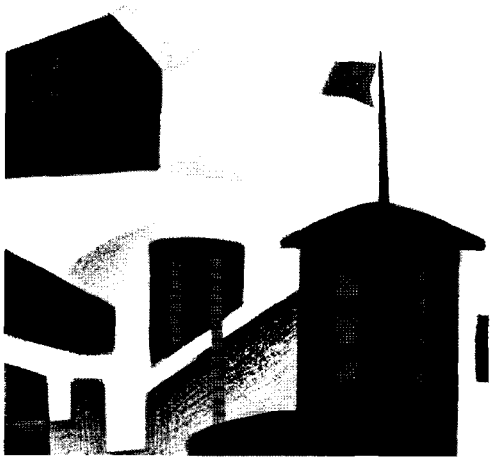
Neither, alas, is easy to come by nor itself the object of wide consensus.

Twelfth-grade scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), aka the nation's report card, are not even reported by state, though 4th- and 8th-grade results are, and have long been shadowed by doubts as to their accuracy, considering that many high-school seniors don't take the exams seriously. They do not, after all, "count" for anything in the student's own life. Other national tests used for college entrance—SATs, ACTs, Advanced Placement—are taken only by a subset of juniors and seniors. And of course none is taken by the horde of young people who don't complete high school.

Though many states have instigated graduation tests, these often have low passing levels and, in any case, are not readily compared from one jurisdiction to the next.

International tests such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are valuable for purposes of comparing U.S. student performance with their overseas counterparts, but these do not occur on a predictable cycle .

As for graduation and dropout rates, the National Center for Education Statistics has multiple definitions and measures; the Census Bureau counts "high-school equivalency" certificates along with actual, on-time graduates; and several independent analysts insist that the true graduation rate is far lower than federal data suggest, very different from state to state, often even different from what states think it is. (Fortunately, this may change over the next few years, as all but a handful of governors, declining to wait for Uncle Sam, announced in July 2005 that they would collaborate on a single, simplified graduation gauge.)



More and more people are discontented with today's high schools. This issue deserves to be on the national stage. But first it has to play in the provinces, in summer stock, and in off-off Broadway theaters.

Thus it will be no small challenge even to monitor and evaluate U.S. high-school reform initiatives if we don't have measures that people agree on. And that's without resolving the policy paradox of whether achievement scores and graduation rates can realistically be raised at the same time, along with the level of student engagement, or whether those worthy goals tend to cancel one another.

At day's end, the multifaceted challenge of high-school reform seems to be a problem that needs to ripen before any comprehensive solution can drop from the policy tree. Americans hold disparate goals for high schools, conflicting priorities for strengthening them, and dissimilar yardsticks for tracking progress.

This is not to say the problem doesn't cry for a solution or that complacency rules the day. In a survey of high-school students released by the National Governors Association in July 2005, more than a third of respondents said their school had not done a good job of challenging them academically or preparing them for college; almost two-thirds said they would work harder if the courses were more demanding or interesting. A month earlier, the Educational Testing Service released a survey indicating that 51 percent of the general public think U.S. high schools need either "major changes" or a "complete overhaul," even if there's considerable dissonance as to what those changes should be. Furthermore, the imperative to make any changes may not extend to their own community high school.

That more and more people are discontented with today's high schools and their results is surely a good thing. This issue deserves to be on the national stage. But first it has to play in the provinces, in summer stock, and in off-off Broadway theaters, where actors, directors, investors, critics, and audiences alike can come to understand it.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and senior editor of Education Next.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Can Markets and Economics Improve America's Schools?

EDUCATION AND CAPITALISM

By Herbert J. Walberg
and Joseph L. Bast
Published by The Hoover Press

"Walberg and Bast have written a scholarly, readable, and timely book that cogently explains how market competition can promote school improvement. I recommend it as a college-level text in economics, education or public policy, and to anyone who cares about the education of our children."

- JOSEPH P. VITERITTI, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

ORDER YOUR COPIES TODAY!

Send check or money order for $15 + $3 shipping and handling to The Heartland Institute at 19 South LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, IL 60603. This and other great books are also available for purchase on our Web site at www.heartland.org.

The Heartland INSTITUTE

THE HEARTLAND INSTITUTE, 19 SOUTH LASALLE STREET #903 CHICAGO, IL 60603

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Surviving a Midlife CRISIS

Advanced Placement Turns Fifty

In 1956, 1,220 college-bound juniors and seniors in 104 American high schools took the first Advanced Placement (AP) exams conducted by the Educational Testing Service for the College Board.

Only 11 subject areas were offered at the time: American history, biology, chemistry, English, French, German, Latin IV (fourth-year Vergil), Latin V (prose, comedy, lyric), mathematics, physics, and Spanish. So few students took the earliest exams that the first AP European history exam, which debuted in 1957, was scored on the second floor of a firehouse near the ETS headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. "There were 59 exams and four of us examiners," recalled Henry Winkler, then a professor of history at Rutgers and later president of the University of Cincinnati. Each answer booklet held responses to one long essay question and the 25 short-response items on the three-hour test. They finished scoring the exams the same day.

"The AP program was unabashedly elitist when it began," says AP chronicler Eric Rothschild, who became a teacher of AP history teachers after retiring from 38 years of teaching social studies at Scarsdale (New York) High School. "Those taking the exams in the early years were largely male, largely students from private prep schools and elite public high schools, and probably mostly Protestant."

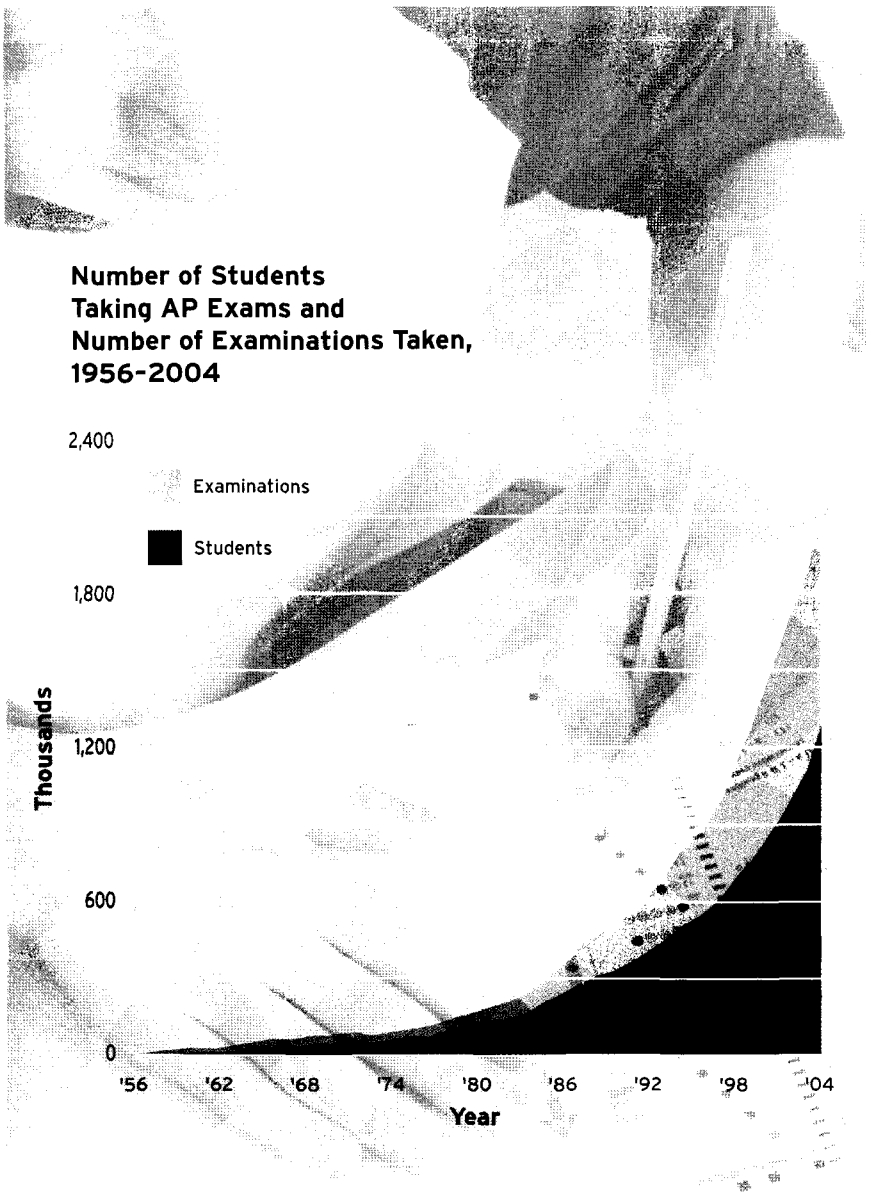
And no wonder. The idea for the program emerged from elite colleges, prep schools, and high schools in two collaborations. One was initiated by Kenyon College and the other by Harvard, Princeton, and Yale as a way of accelerating and fortifying the education of the nation's future leaders in anticipation of cold war national-security demands. "Shortening the conventional process for some students by even one year," concluded one of the group's final reports, "if it could be done with no significant educational loss, would add thousands of professional 'man years' of service to the nation's communities."

BY ANDREW MOLLISON

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Testing Tsunami (Figure 1)

The number of students taking AP exams and the number of exams taken have both skyrocketed. Even so, the average AP student took the same number of program tests in 2004 (1.8) as in 1956 (1.7).



SOURCE: College Board, "Advanced Placement Report to the Nation: 2005"

A half century later, the cold war over, the AP program is still with us, still growing (see Figure 1). Advanced Placement courses and exams now cover 35 subjects including art history, economics (macro and micro), and studio art (2-D and 3-D design), and they are taken by more than a million students (including many blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and more girls than boys) from 11,000 public and 4,000 other schools (including more than 800 in other countries and territories).

The essentials remain the same: high-school students take college-level courses, taught by teachers in their schools, and then take exams designed by the College Board to show that they have mastered the subject at college-level proficiency. Good exam results can be parlayed into college credits and permissions to advance directly to higher-level college courses. And despite the vast expansion of the number of students taking AP courses and exams, the average number of tests taken by students during their high-school careers has barely changed: 1.7 AP tests per examinee in 1956 and 1.8 per examinee in 2005.

Aside from its explosive growth, the most visible change during the program's first 50 years has been the transformation of the demographic profile of the typical AP examinee. But has the program actually increased student college readiness? Do AP courses boost student achievement? Many of the national barometers of high-school student achievement and college readiness show a flat line on proficiency scales over the past 50 years. This is true even of the top 10 percent of students taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams, many of whom, presumably, take AP exams. Their scores have not improved in 30 years. And findings from research about the impact of AP course taking have been ambiguous. The College Board is also facing an outburst of quality-control problems with some of its more popular AP courses. If the AP program is so good, why hasn't it made more inroads into high-school academic life? It seems that the much-admired program is suffering the slings and arrows, creaks and pains, of middle age.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Those passing one or more AP tests probably compose less than 10 percent of the group that entered high school together.

The Advanced Placement Boom

On the surface, the AP program looks better than ever. By May of 2005, participation in AP exams was at record levels, with 1,221,016 high-school students taking one or more AP test. If recent patterns held, 83 percent of the test-takers were juniors or seniors; the rest, mostly sophomores. And despite the popular media image of an AP student as an overstressed overachiever from a high school in an upscale suburb, examinees now come from a broad swath of U.S. high schools.

A hint of the enterprise's current problems, however, is in the fact that 300,000 additional American students were enrolled in AP courses last year but didn't take an AP exam in May, potentially embarrassing college admissions officers who had recruited some of those students because of transcripts loaded with AP courses. AP teachers say some students who skip the test feel unprepared, while others are seniors who have already been admitted to college and no longer need to use AP scores to gild their credentials.

Still, the AP program has become so widely accepted that one-fourth of the public-high-school graduates in the class of 2004 had taken an AP course. One-fifth had taken at least one AP exam, and just over 13 percent had earned a "passing" AP score of 5 (extremely well qualified), 4 (well qualified), or 3 (qualified). (A score of 5 is considered the equivalent of an A+ in a college course, a 4 is a college B, and a 3 is considered to be a C in an introductory college class.)

"This is way more than ever took rigorous, college-level courses" in high school, says Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, but "13 percent isn't enough. Fifty-seven percent of high-school graduates enter college." In addition, exultation at the record numbers of AP participants has to be tempered somewhat by unsettling reports that nearly a third of public-high-school students drop out or fall behind before their class graduates. The bottom line: those passing one or more AP tests probably comprise less than 10 percent of the group that entered high school together.

Moreover, ACT Inc., which began measuring college readiness as the American College Testing Program in the 1950s, reports that among the college aspirants who took its admission exams last year, only 21 percent of the graduating seniors attained scores high enough in all four subjects—English, reading, math, and science—to indicate that they wouldn't need to take a no-credit remedial course when they entered college. Colleges are now requiring nearly 3 out of every 10 first-time college students to take at least one remedial course in reading, writing, or math in their freshman year. Apparently, the AP program hasn't so much raised the level of the curriculum in the American high school as it has created an escape hatch that lets a small number of ambitious students get out of the low-demand environment for a few hours.

Diversity on the Move

At this year's annual AP national conference in Houston, attended by more than 2,500 teachers, professors, and administrators, College Board officials stressed that their efforts to extend the benefits of college-level courses to previously underserved high-school students are beginning to pay off. In 1955, the typical AP examinee was a boy; today, by a margin of 56 percent to 44 percent, she is a girl. While the number of white students taking AP exams grew in recent years, it grew more slowly than the numbers in other groups. By last year, only 64.5 percent of the test-takers identified themselves as non-Latino whites.

Caperton points to Florida as "an example of what a statewide effort will do" to increase AP participation, especially in rural, small, or heavily minority schools. Like many states, Florida subsidizes examination fees. But Florida also gives faculty bonuses and extra AP funding to a public high school every time one of its students scores a 3 or better on an AP exam. The money can be used for AP materials or for professional development in AP content and techniques for teachers. Florida was also one of the first states to form a virtual school, offering free online AP courses to students who wanted to take an AP course that wasn't offered in their own schools. Between 1999 and 2005, the number of public-school students in Florida who took AP exams jumped by 95 percent. That included increases of 132 percent for African Americans and 137 percent for Hispanics.

What's the Point of Advanced Placement?

Proponents of AP courses and exams, especially the expansionists, believe that the experience of taking an AP course pays dividends for students down the road, making them more likely to do well academically in college courses and to receive their degrees on time. The most enthusiastic believe that AP courses are so good that they help students do well in college even if the students skip the exam or score only a 1 (no recommendation) or 2 (partially qualified).

Such proponents frequently cite statistics published by the National Center for Educational Accountability (NCEA), which tracked the performance of Texas AP students who entered public universities in Texas in 1996 through 1998. The center's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

researchers found that students who had enrolled in AP courses earned higher GPAs in college and had higher college graduation rates than those who didn't take AP courses. The AP advantage appeared even when students were separated into groups by ethnicity and income.

But other research, using more sophisticated analytic strategies to control simultaneously for the effects of multiple distinctions among students taking AP courses, casts doubt on these findings. In fact, in another study of Texas school records, presented at the 2005 meeting of the American Economic Association, Kristin Klopfenstein of Texas Christian University and Kathleen Thomas of Mississippi State University found, as Klopfenstein says, "zero effect for the average kid" of AP enrollment on college performance.

At first, researchers at the Austin-based NCEA vigorously disputed Klopfenstein and Thomas's findings. But when they reanalyzed their data using similar techniques, the NCEA researchers quietly slipped a one-paragraph announcement into their newsletter conceding that AP exam scores, not AP enrollment, predict how well a student will do in college. In other words, simply taking an AP class isn't enough in itself. Only those who do well on the exam see benefits down the road. And it could be the case, says Klopfenstein, that these students were simply smarter to begin with. "We don't know yet."

Another possibility for the discrepancy is that the results of both studies are warped by misleading data in Texas. If a significant fraction of the AP courses in Texas are, as critics charge, just preexisting courses that were relabeled by educators eager to please government and business leaders who have been crusading for more AP participation, it would not be surprising that the studies found that simply taking a course labeled AP did not boost preparedness for college.

Transcript analysts do run into cases where schools are merely "changing the marquee but showing the same movie inside," says Clifford Adelman, a veteran federal researcher at NCES.

"It looks like the labels [on some AP courses in Texas] do not necessarily match the content," said Chrys Dougherty, research director of the NCEA. "Lots of kids are getting [high school] credit for advanced placement who can't pass an AP exam."

Simply taking an AP class isn't enough in itself. Only those who do well on the exam see benefits down the road.

AP Cleans Up Its Act

While the AP exams have maintained their high reputation as a mirror of typical introductory college course requirements, opinions about whether AP courses themselves are better or worse than they were 50 years ago are split. Up to now, the College Board has not monitored the courses, and any school could call any of its courses an AP course. The theory was that the exams offered sufficient validation of the rigor and focus of the course. Poor courses would lead to poor exam results.

However, now that AP course taking influences college admission decisions, which are often made before seniors take their AP exams, the use of tests as the only quality control for the courses no longer satisfies the colleges and universities that dominate the College Board. Warnings were issued in 2001 by the College Board's Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program and again in 2002 by a committee of the National Research Council (NRC). "Coverage of content [in science courses] may be superficial and opportunities for inquiry-based experiences insufficient," the NRC committee said after examining AP courses in biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics. "The committee also has learned that some teachers discourage students from taking AP … courses or the final examinations when poor performance is anticipated."

That's a shame, because common sense tells you that taking a genuine AP course *is* good for students, even if they flunk the test, contends *Washington Post* education writer Jay Mathews. "Even if they struggle with it, they've gone one-on-one against the academic equivalent of Michael Jordan. They'll have a visceral sense of what they're going to come up against in college."

Caperton points out that the College Board has implemented or started to implement virtually every recommendation of its own commission and the NRC committee.

One reform, seen as advisable in an era of widely publicized data-driven comparisons of schools, involves a new way of measuring the success of an AP program in a school (or, for that matter, a district or state).

Until quite recently, the College Board honored schools in which a high percentage of exam-takers scored a passing score of 3 or higher on an AP test. But educators complained that this approach gave schools an incentive to discourage all but their very best test-takers from taking an AP exam.

Another metric was invented by Mathews and is published periodically by *Newsweek* as the "challenge index." It is based on the ratio of seniors in a school (the fewer the better) to the number of AP exams taken (the more the better) by all the school's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

students, regardless of performance. That perversely rewards schools where few students reach the senior class. "Technically, a school could rank high by having all its students take lots of AP exams, even if they all bombed because their AP courses weren't high quality," said Trevor Packer, executive director of the College Board's AP Program.

So the board this year unveiled a new measure that it described as "the best single measure of equity and excellence in AP": the percentage of the student body or of a graduating class that earns a passing score of 3 or higher on at least one AP exam. That way, a school can't inflate its rank by relying on a small number of polymath geniuses, by sending ill-prepared students into AP exams, or by restricting access to AP. Students who score 1 or 2 on an exam would neither raise nor lower a school's standing.

Two more substantive changes are on the way:

- The College Board is revamping its science and history courses, which now mirror typical introductory courses in colleges that receive score reports on a lot of AP students. The courses have been described as "a mile wide and an inch deep." Redesigning the courses to reflect "best practices" is expected to take the rest of this decade as the board attempts to strike a balance between those who favor the mile-wide approach and those who prefer the mile-deep. Each subject has been assigned to committees led by college professors and including experienced AP teachers, with expert advice being solicited from groups that include the congressionally chartered National Research Council and the American Historical Association.

- Starting in the 2006–07 school year, the College Board will protect the reputation of its AP trademark by refusing to let a school call a course an AP course unless the school meets two conditions. First, the course must cover a genuine AP subject (as opposed to bogus subjects, such as the AP journalism course mentioned by the NRC committee). Second, the school's principal must submit a satisfactory self audit describing such items as the course's outline, some lesson plans, available support materials, and the teacher's experience, content knowledge, and opportunities for professional development.

This move toward quality control could be the first step back toward renewing the drive for national curriculum standards that flared up and flamed out in the 1990s in disputes over ideology, pedagogy, course content, and control of the public schools, speculated Bruce Johnstone, former chancellor of the 64-campus State University of New York.

"People could start wondering who authorized the College Board to set national standards for high schools," says Johnstone, who served on the College Board's AP commission. "This question has been glossed over as long as the AP has been perceived as basically good—a lot like collegiate introductory courses and not ideologically influenced—and the rest of the high-school curriculum has been seen as so flawed."

Perhaps there could be worse fates, however, than being perceived as setting the gold standard for high-school curricula.

The Resistance to AP

In Houston this summer, Nina Shokraii Rees, Assistant Deputy Secretary for Innovation and Improvement at the Department of Education, renewed the DOE's pledge of support for the College Board's efforts to see that the AP program will "leave no child behind." But she also noted that small rural schools and schools in poor neighborhoods remain much less likely than suburban schools to offer AP courses.

In fact, low-income examinees remain few and far between, even though two-thirds of public high schools, including many in large cities, now offer at least one AP course. Though federal, state, and College Board subsidies pay all or part of their AP fee, currently $82 per exam, only 10 percent of last year's AP examinees came from low-income families, according to the DOE. That was up from 8 percent five years previously and ahead of the benchmark targets in the department's five-year performance plan. But it was also well below the official federal estimate that 16 percent of public school students are from low-income families.

However, teachers say poverty is seldom a major factor in holding down the number of students taking AP courses or AP exams. Teachers at the Houston conference said more common reasons are that students aren't offered an AP course in subjects that they like, attend a school that resists letting students who might fail an AP exam into an AP course, don't have friends who take AP courses, or haven't been taught that it takes more than a high-school diploma to be ready to succeed in college.

Such concerns don't arise among the eager beavers competing for admission to the 15 percent of colleges and universities that are highly selective, says Michael Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University. Kirst has spent years documenting the wide gap between the relaxed class schedules of many high-school students and the set of rigorous core courses that would prepare them to succeed in college.

"The ones who get hurt [by a failure to take AP and other rigorous high-school courses] are the 80 percent of students who are not in Advanced Placement or honors classes, and who want to go to the 85 percent of colleges and universities that offer broad access," Kirst says. Many get into a less selective college, but never graduate. Too many, he explains, "won't be ready for college because they have no clue about which high-school courses they need to take."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A program designed to help speed students through college as fast as possible is now used by most students to get into college.

Vertical Teaming

The influx of underprepared students into colleges has created today's strange paradox: colleges are offering more high school-level remedial courses for no credit at a time when high schools are offering more college-level courses that earn college credits.

Many high-school students who say they want to go to college also believe (sometimes, justifiably) that they haven't been taught to read and do math at the level needed to pass a college-level course. That is why the College Board uses some of the fees it gets for AP exams on an array of programs designed to get middle-school educators and high-school educators to cooperate with one another in preparing students for the rigor of AP courses.

One of the board's approaches is "vertical teaming" between AP educators in high schools and the "pre-AP" teachers in Grades 9 and 10 and in the middle schools that supply their freshmen. Yet partnerships between middle and high schools on pre-AP and AP sequencing remain rare. One reason: trying to get overscheduled educators from one school to work with those from another isn't easy, especially when tight budgets in many states lead to demands to focus spending "in the classroom" rather than on planning and professional development for teachers.

Like the Houston conference goers, members of the online discussion groups that include some 29,000 of the more than 110,000 AP teachers in the United States debate the pros and cons of the trend toward lowering barriers, such as GPA requirements, to AP courses.

"The biggest assumption by other people is that somehow AP teachers have an easier job because they have the smartest kids," says Carol Wingard, an AP English teacher in Columbus, Georgia. "First of all, the smartest kids aren't always the best motivated. Second, we also deal with more-motivated kids who aren't necessarily the smartest. I work many more hours than I ever did before."

Certainly the College Board's efforts, now some 15 years old, to simultaneously increase access, equity, and excellence in the AP program seem praiseworthy, despite the persistence of the gap that Caperton laments between the many who want to go to college and the few who take AP courses.

AP Changes from a Way Through to a Way In

The AP program has evolved quite far from its roots—winning the cold war and alleviating the boredom of superbly educated students who had been exposed to virtually identical courses during their last year of prep school and their first year of college. But it remains focused on academic excellence. That is why many schools give extra weight to AP grades in calculating GPAs and why many college admission officers see AP course taking as a sign that applicants were ambitious enough to take the most rigorous courses available in their schools.

The College Board and other AP enthusiasts still tout the program as a cost-saving tool for accelerated learning. They tell the status-conscious or cash-short that high scores could help students save time or money by rushing through college. But numerous studies have shown that hardly anybody sharp and obsessive enough to pass several AP courses wants to rush through college.

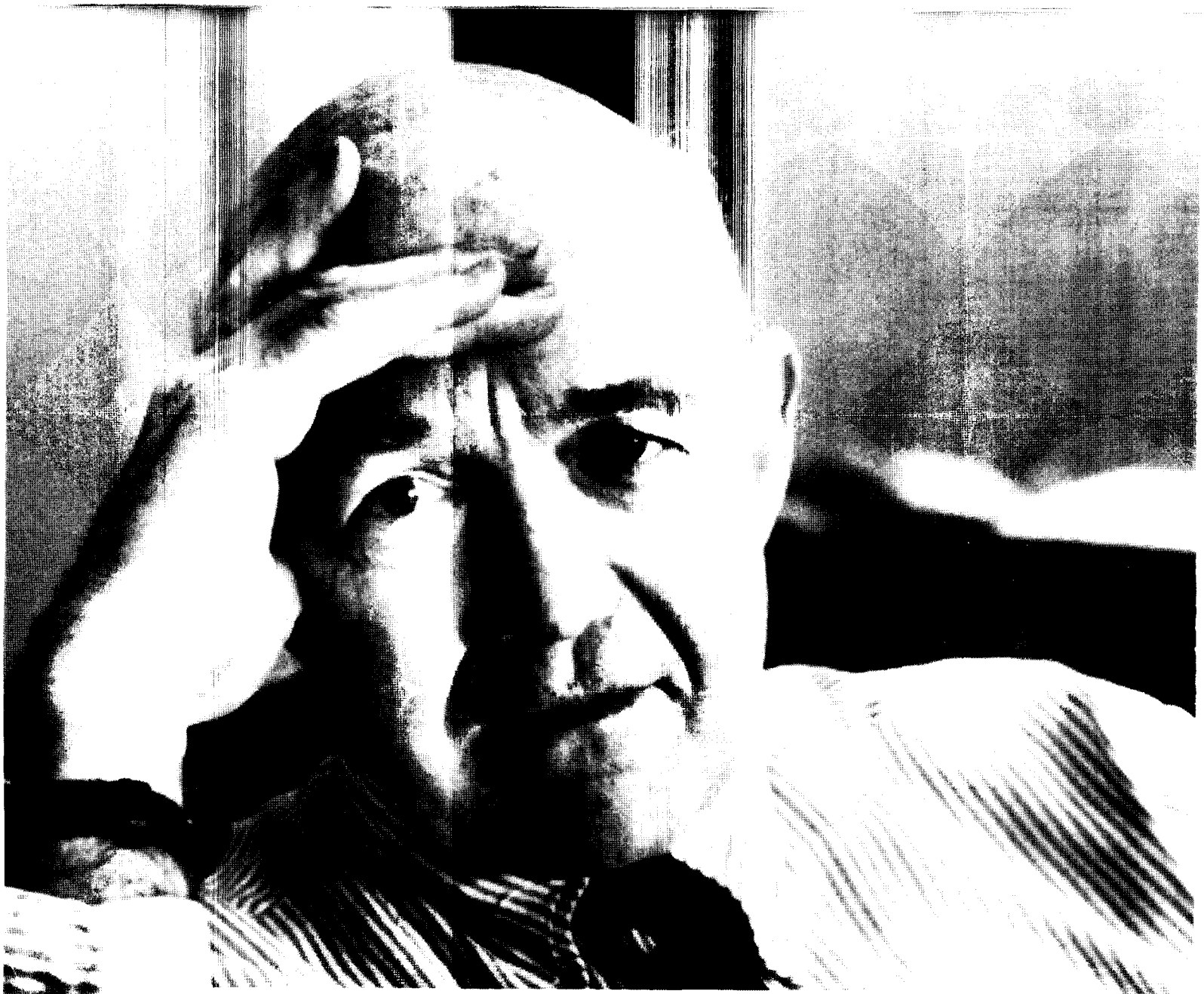
RoperASW was hired by the College Board to survey students who had scores of 3 or higher about why they took AP classes. The firm reported that 83 percent said they wanted to increase their chances of going to the college of their choice. But only 33 percent said they wanted to finish college sooner. All but 15 percent did get credits for advanced placement in college, but they used those concessions to make room for other courses, rather than to graduate ahead of schedule.

"The AP program is useful because it has made it easier for [high school] students to get higher-level, more sophisticated courses," says Marlyn McGrath Lewis, director of admissions for Harvard College. "More students who are applying to demanding and rigorous colleges are able to get a more rigorous level of preparation for college than was once the case."

In effect, ironically enough, a program designed to help speed students through college as fast as possible is now used by most students to get into college. Perhaps that fact alone answers today's most vexing question about the AP: does it improve the academic experience of those who take part? But it remains to be seen if the College Board is up for tackling a bigger problem in its next 50 years: using AP as a lever to raise the academic standards of high schools.

Andrew Mollison, a freelance education writer, has been a Washington correspondent since 1974. He is a former president of the National Press Club.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The high-school problem is nothing new. In one of his early writings, excerpted in the following pages, James S. Coleman, the brilliant sociologist who later wrote the famous report on the equality of opportunity for education (the "Coleman Report") and the first study of public and private schools, identified the essential high-school problem: "our adolescents today are cut off, probably more than ever before, from the adult society." Thus the title of his classic work, *The Adolescent Society*, published in 1961, the germ of which first appeared in the *Harvard Education Review* in 1959 as "Academic Achievement and the Structure of Competition." Writing about schools as they existed in the latter half of the 1950s, Coleman showed the ways in which the organization of school life reinforces teenage anti-learning norms. Except for some quirks of that time and place—the subordinate place of "girls" in American society (which Coleman seems to be tacitly questioning) and the use of the masculine pronoun to refer to people more generally, for example—his essay has a timeless quality, as worth reading today as when Coleman put pen to page.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Adolescent Society

James Coleman's still-prescient insights

From "Academic Achievement and the Structure of Competition," James S. Coleman. Harvard Education Review, *Volume 29, No. 4 (Fall 1959).*

In secondary education ... we are beset by a peculiar paradox: in our complex industrial society there is increasingly more to learn, and formal education is ever more important in shaping one's life chances; at the same time, there is coming to be more and more an independent "society of adolescents," an adolescent culture which shows little interest in education and focuses the attention of teenagers on cars, dates, sports, popular music, and other matters just as unrelated to school.

Are these conflicting tendencies "natural" ones, irreversible processes resulting from changes in society? Is the nonchalance of the adolescent culture toward scholastic matters, its irresponsibility and hedonism, simply because "teenagers are that way"? Is it something which must be accepted? If so, then the hope of developing students truly interested in learning lies in "rescuing" from the adolescent culture a few students who accept adult values, set their sights on long-range goals, and pay little attention to the frivolous activities of their fellows. This approach is very nearly the one we take now, in our emphasis on special programs for "the gifted child," our concern with selecting the most intelligent and setting them apart with special tasks which will further separate them from their fellows.

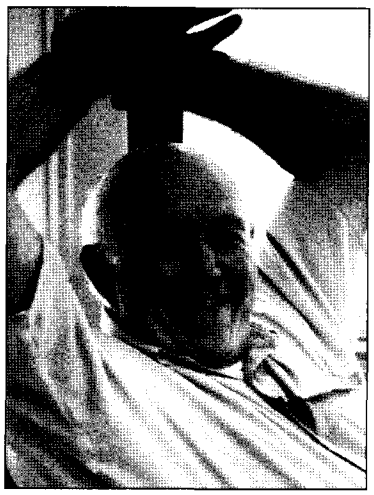
Coleman calls this approach "too simple" and suggests that it would be giving in to the "hedonism and lack of interest in learning of the adolescent culture" to do so. Besides, he says, this approach "probably misses far more potential scientists and scholars than it finds."

If we refuse to accept as inevitable the irresponsibility and educational unconcern of the adolescent culture, then this poses a serious challenge. For to change the norms, the very foci of attention, of a cultural system is a difficult task—far more complex than that of changing an individual's attitudes and interests. Yet if the challenge can be met, if the attention of the adolescent culture can be directed toward, rather than away from, those educational goals which adults hold for children, then this provides a far more fundamental and satisfactory solution to the problem of focusing teenagers' attention on learning.

Adolescents Don't Like School

Coleman then describes his two-year study of the "climate of values" in nine public high schools that gave rise to his conclusions about this "adolescent society." The schools were all in the Midwest and included those from small towns, suburbs, and cities. Varied in size and in the social classes of their students, they represented, he said, a healthy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



sample of American schools. Though racial and ethnic breakdowns were missing from his data, what Coleman discovered, and documents with some detail, is that students didn't care much about scholastic things; that, in all the schools, they cared more for "good looks" and "being an athlete" than they did for "good grades" and "being smart."

Far less important to the adolescent community are the activities which school is ostensibly designed for: scholastic achievement, leadership of academic clubs, and the like. For example, the question:

"If you could be remembered here at school for one of the three things below, which one would you want it to be: brilliant student, star athlete, or most popular?"

Boys responded star athlete over 40 percent of the time, and brilliant student less than 30 percent of the time. This despite the fact that the boy is asked how he would like to be remembered in school, *an institution explicitly designed to train students, not athletes.*

It is clear from all these data that the interests of teenagers are not focused around studies, and that scholastic achievement is at most of minor importance in giving status or prestige to an adolescent in the eyes of other adolescents. This is perhaps to be expected in some areas, where parents place little emphasis on education. Yet the most striking result from these questions was the fact that the values current in the well-to-do suburban school ... were no more oriented to scholastic success than those in the small-town school or the working-class school.... In every school, more boys wanted to be remembered as a star athlete than as a brilliant student. And in six of the nine schools, "good looks" was first, second, or third in importance as a criterion for being in the leading crowd of girls.

Jails, Boot Camp, Factories, and Schools

Even in those instances where scholastic success was valued, Coleman reported, it came with a price: "the success must be gained without special efforts, without doing anything beyond the required work." In effect, then, even if a school could "immunize" the academically inclined student against the unscholastic larger culture, that student remained isolated from "the crowd." The answer to this untenable situation, said Coleman, was to change the norms of that culture within the institution, the school, that the adolescents found themselves inhabiting. Coleman offers an analysis of "institutional demands and group response" to set the stage for his suggested solutions. He specifically mentions schools, jails, the military, and factories as institutions in which "an administrative corps" makes demands and a larger group (students, prisoners, soldiers, workers) responds. The "group norms" in the response are particularly important to Coleman.

The same process which occurs among prisoners in a jail and among workers in a factory is found among students in a school. The institution is different, but the demands are there, and the students develop a collective response to these demands. This response takes a similar form to that of workers in industry—holding down effort to a level which can be maintained by all. The students' name for the rate-buster is the "curve-raiser" ... and their methods of enforcing the work-restricting norms are similar to those of workers—ridicule, kidding, exclusion from the group.

Against the Grain—Against the Grade

This doesn't mean that there aren't "scholastically oriented subgroups," says Coleman. The problem is that, as a subgroup, "intense effort" is required to go against the norm.

In a high school, the norms act to hold down the achievements of those who are above average, so that the school's demands will be at a level easily maintained by the majority. Grades are almost completely relative, in effect ranking students relative to others in their class. Thus extra achievement by one student not only raises his position, but in effect lowers the position of others.

This group response, Coleman says, is "purely rational" and has many of the same characteristics as other endeavors that combine "to prevent excessive competition." What Coleman suggests, however, is a different way of organizing the competitive instincts and incentives in a school. He points out that there is a difference in the outcomes if the competition is organized through groups rather than between individuals. While what he characterizes as "interpersonal competition in scholastic matters" generates social pressure not to excel, "interscholastic competition in athletics has quite the opposite effect." In fact, he cites athletics, where "there is no epithet comparable to 'curve-raiser,' there is no ostracism for too intense effort or for outstanding achievement," as a model for the kind of competition he believes needs to be introduced to a school's scholastic endeavors.

One obvious solution is to substitute interscholastic (and intramural) competition in scholastic matters for the interpersonal

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

competition for grades which presently exists. Such a substitution would require a revision of the notion that each student's achievement must be continually evaluated or "graded" in every subject. It would instead make such evaluations infrequent, and subsidiary to the group contests and games, both within the school and between schools.

Changing Institutional Norms

Coleman knows that it will take some "considerable inventiveness" to find the best group competitions to change the cultural norms of the high school. But he nevertheless suggests some: "intellectual games, problems, group and individual science projects ... debate teams, group discussion tournaments, drama contests, music contests, science fairs ... math tournaments, speaking contests...."

There are many examples in high schools which show something about the effects such competition might have. As an example, one of the schools I have been studying is too small to compete effectively in most sports, but participates with vigor each year in the state music contests. It nearly always wins a high place in the statewide contest. The striking result of this successful competition is the high status of music among the adolescents themselves. It is a thing of pride to be a trombone soloist in this school, and the leading boys in the school are also leading musicians—not, as in many schools, scornful of such an unmanly activity. This is despite the fact that the school serves a largely farming community.

Finally, Coleman believes that these shifts in the competitive structure of high schools can change the norms and values of the institution, for the better, to encourage academics. "If the activity, whether it be debate or math competition or basketball, receives no publicity, no recognition in the newspapers and by the community generally, then its winning will have brought little glory to the school, and will bring little encouragement to the participants." So, says Coleman, change the competitive structure of the high school and we can change them from places of athletic to academic prowess.

The present structure of rewards in high schools produces a response on the part of an adolescent social system which effectively impedes the process of education. Yet the structure of rewards could be so designed that the adolescent norms themselves would reinforce educational goals.

James S. Coleman, 1926–95, American sociologist, was born in Bedford, Indiana, and taught at Stanford, the University of Chicago, and Johns Hopkins University.

New Leaders *for* New Schools

Promoting high academic achievement for every child by attracting, preparing, and supporting the next generation of outstanding leaders for our nation's urban public schools.

Great schools are led by great principals.

Become an urban public school principal.

New Leaders for New Schools is looking for candidates who have a relentless drive to improve education for all children, a record of effective teaching, and a strong foundation of skills needed for general management and leadership.

If you believe that every child can achieve academically at high levels, learn more at

www.nlns.org

646-792-1070

New Leaders for New Schools is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination against any person because of age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, race, religious creed, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

Baltimore • California's Bay Area • Chicago
Memphis • New York City • Washington, D.C

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bill and Melinda Gates shift from computers in libraries to reform in high schools

BY PAUL T. HILL

The biggest philanthropy in the world sits in an unmarked building next to an industrial dry dock. It does little to attract attention, but everyone knows it's there. And even though its official address is a post office box, everyone involved in education reform knows that this particular mail slot means a half-billion dollars a year to help fix our public schools.

This is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, P.O. Box 23350, Seattle, Washington, a philanthropy created by the Microsoft founder and his wife in 2000 and now employing more than two hundred people and worth almost $30 billion, more than a billion of which it gives away each year. The foundation has already invested nearly a billion dollars in an effort to redesign the American high school. It supports some 1,500 existing schools; 450 of them are either restructured or brand new. Chicago is opening 100 new schools with the help of Gates Foundation money; New York City, 200. Gates is putting money into high-school redesign in Oakland, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Boston.

Not all of the Gates Foundation money goes to education: thirty-five percent is earmarked for global health initiatives, and a sizable amount stays with social-welfare and civic-improvement programs in the Pacific Northwest. However, enough of it is spent trying to improve the nation's public schools (see Figure 1) that it is worth asking if Bill Gates, a college dropout, knows what he's doing. In fact, when the world's richest man started his philanthropic work, in the mid-1990s, he was handing out computers to public libraries, which seemed a perfectly reasonable endeavor for a former computer geek who runs the world's largest software company.

How did the young mogul (Gates just turned 50) come to the conclusion, as he told the nation's governors at an Education Summit in Washington, D.C. in 2005, that "America's high schools are obsolete"? More important, how did Gates and his giving, through various philanthropic proxies, evolve from rewiring libraries to reinventing the American high school?

One view is that the technology wizard-turned-businessman is simply applying to philanthropy his genius for finding empty market niches. That strategy is easy to understand in international health, buying malaria and AIDS vaccines for destitute African communities and creating new systems for getting them delivered. But if there are miracle education drugs, they haven't emerged yet. And the education delivery systems, though they exist, don't work very well, especially with bold new initiatives, which is what the Gates Foundation is attempting in education.

L'État, ce n'est pas Moi!

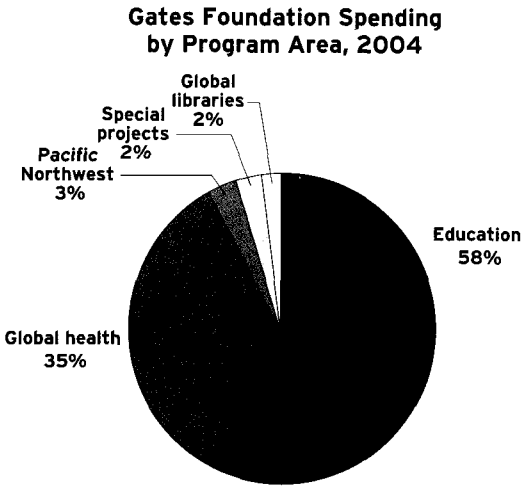
First, a word from the critics, as a way, perhaps, of explaining what's at stake here and what Gates Foundation money has come to represent in the education-reform business. This particular branch of criticism is worried primarily that Gates is spending his money in the wrong places (see Table 1). The problems of elementary school, for instance, still aren't solved, they say. Promoting small schools, they grumble, is a goal too narrowly focused on raising test scores and too insensitive to the communitarian roots of the preexisting small-schools movement.

Though there are always legitimate grounds for disagreement about priorities, Gates Foundation defenders, me among them, see these criticisms as derived from misplaced expectations. A foundation can create one ingrate and ten disappointed suitors by making just one grant. (It's only right that I should admit to being, at different times, both a happy grantee and a disgruntled rejectee.)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Large Slice of a Large Pie (Figure 1)

Of the nearly $1.3 billion in grants that the Gates Foundation made in 2004, a majority went to education.



SOURCE: *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2004 Annual Report*

The bottom line is that even the Gates Foundation can't do everything. It is not a government agency. While it is a rich organization by philanthropic standards, it is a very small player in the $435 billion public-education marketplace. (See "The New Philanthropists," *features*, Fall 2005.) Despite its size, the Gates Foundation needs to pick its shots. As Gene Bottoms of the Southern Regional Education Board commented in an early foundation planning session, "Well, Mr. Gates has got a lot of money, but even he can't pay to solve every problem we can name."

But can Gates solve any problem? Can his foundation make a difference in education? Is $300 million a year too much? Or not enough?

The Early Days

The foundation's focus was not always on high schools, says Tom Vander Ark, MBA, engineer, businessman turned school superintendent (in Federal Way, Washington, an industrial suburb between Seattle and Tacoma), and now head of the Gates Foundation's education work. In fact, in the beginning it wasn't even about schools. Gates entered the philanthropy world in the mid-1990s, before Vander Ark came on the scene, with big investments in libraries, hoping to make Internet access universal, especially for the poor. Technology was something Bill and Melinda Gates and their close collaborators understood. They also believed Internet access would become a precondition for entry to the new economy, and they wanted to make sure poor families and poor communities weren't left out.

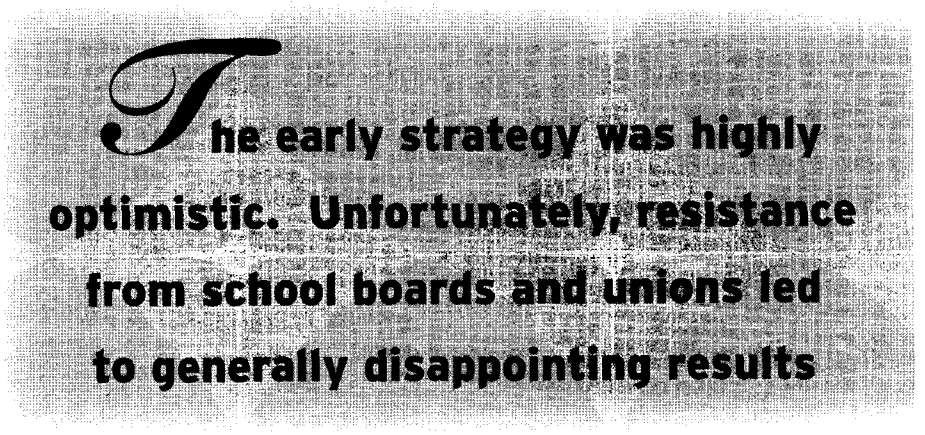
The libraries investment, widely credited as a success (and still something that the foundation contributes to), led to an interest in technology-based learning. In 1998, the Gates Libraries Foundation morphed into the Gates Learning Foundation. The Learning Foundation promoted Internet-based teacher training and greater integration of technology into the classroom. Once the foundation was involved in the classroom, perhaps it was inevitable that Gates would get interested in what was taught there and how. But he had education concerns in his heritage as well. Advancing the cause of education for the poor had been a Gates family concern for decades, predating the foundation and, for that matter, Microsoft. Bill's mother, Mary Gates, had served as a regent of the University of Washington State from 1975 to 1993. She was a consistent advocate of increasing opportunities for poor and minority students so they would be prepared to enter college. Bill's father, William Gates II, succeeded his wife as a regent and carried on the family tradition by, among other things, recommending that the university defy a ban on affirmative action in admissions. It thus came as no surprise that Bill III and his wife, Melinda, a Duke graduate, would devote a substantial part of their giving to education when they started their own foundation (with $20 billion) and absorbed the other family foundations into its work six years ago. Proof of the pudding: a billion dollars to the United Negro College Fund in 2002.

PHOTO/ GETTY IMAGES

Bill and Melinda Gates

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It has been up to Tom Vander Ark to work out the details of the Gates's evolving education interests. One of several prominent Seattle-area school superintendents interviewed for the education program job at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Vander Ark welcomed the founders' expanding interests in education. Though he himself had once created a cyber school to attract home schoolers back to the district, Vander Ark was more a business strategist and education reformer than a tech enthusiast. Of all the candidates for the job at the helm of the foundation's education initiative, Vander Ark was the least inclined to think that all was basically right with state and local education policy. The Gates were coming to a similar conclusion.


The early strategy was highly optimistic. Unfortunately, resistance from school boards and unions led to generally disappointing results

A Bumpy Road to High Schools

Even after he was hired, however, and given the task of creating a K–12 strategy, Vander Ark could have led in a direction other than high school. He could have drawn the donors' attention to curriculum, teaching methods, remediation, or new uses of technology, all of which interested them. But after many hours of conversations with researchers and practitioners as diverse as Anthony Bryk (Stanford University), Linda Darling Hammond (Stanford), Gene Bottoms (Southern Regional Education Board), Judy Codding (America's Choice cofounder), and Ted Sizer (Coalition of Essential Schools), Vander Ark became convinced that high school was where the reform money was most needed and that existing high schools were intrinsically weak institutions that could not be fixed on the margins. (See this issue's *forum*, "The American High School," page 13.)

Though the high-school reform message came from all sides, including education traditionalists, Vander Ark initially leaned toward ideas associated with progressive education. He liked the notion of low-income public-school students' getting the same kind of instruction as rich kids in private schools. Small size, in fact, became a proxy for other desirable features missing from the modern high school: intimacy, coherence, transparency, and equity. Vander Ark was deeply impressed by Deborah Meier's vision of a small school as a personalized environment where adults do whatever is necessary to ensure that students learn. He was also strongly influenced by Harvard researcher Tony Wagner, himself a disciple of Meier and Sizer. With Wagner's help, Vander Ark sought out educators who wanted to help small schools adopt teacher-developed curriculum and project-based learning.

Vander Ark emphasized progressive approaches to education because they seemed rich and egalitarian, not because the Gates had any particular preferences for them. In such matters, Vander Ark explains, the donors set basic strategy (focus on high schools, create many small ones, find and replicate promising models) but left the execution to others.

That execution, in those early years, meant large grants to school districts—$25 million to Seattle alone—that said they would break large high schools into many small ones. But it also meant sizable gifts, between $1 and $9 million, that were, essentially, bets on small-school innovators. Those early grant recipients included Sizer; Larry Rosenstock, creator of San Diego's High Tech High, which emphasized project-based internships in local businesses; Dennis Littky, founder of The Big Picture Company, which was dedicated to reproducing the progressive Met High School in Providence, Rhode Island, throughout the country; and Doug Thomas, who had developed a Minnesota-based teacher cooperative. Vander Ark hoped to change K–12 education by helping individuals with great ideas. These individuals would create schools so good that the whole public-education system would be forced to imitate them.

The early strategy was highly optimistic, especially for the first grants given in Washington state. For those state grants Vander Ark and his colleagues relied on superintendents and school board members whom they knew personally and who could be trusted to "get it" in the absence of specific agreements about what they would do with Gates's money. Unfortunately, superintendent turnover and resistance from school boards and unions led to generally disappointing results.

Despite what some criticized as a cocksure demeanor, the foundation did not expect success to be automatic and was not surprised by these initial failures. However, it did believe, from the first grant announcements to the present, as foundation staffer David Ferrero explains, "There is a school design, instructional method, or technology application out there someplace that will create a performance breakthrough. We don't know what it is yet, but we are determined to find it." This more than anything else is how the foundation mirrors Microsoft's operating style: identify an unmet need and invest in multiple approaches until the best one emerges.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dollars for High School (Table 1)

The top Gates Foundation education grantees in 2004 were working on programs for students of high-school age.

Grantee	Total funding ($ in thousands)	Duration (years)	Purpose
New Visions for Public Schools	25,107	5	Small-school development
New Leaders for New Schools	9,967	3.75	Small-school principal training and support
College Entrance Examination Board	8,250	1	Expansion of high school program in New York City
Jobs for the Future Inc.	7,614	4	Technical assistance for early-college high schools
Urban Assembly Inc.	7,050	5	Creation of 10 New York City high schools
Portland Community College	6,997	5	Development of College Bound sites for at-risk youth
Antioch University	6,122	4.3	Expansion of early-college program
Middle College High School Consortium	6,000	5	Expansion of early-college program

SOURCE: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

But even the successes have downsides, and Vander Ark now knows that the system can ignore a few models of excellence. Moreover, as a key foundation staffer says, "There just aren't that many Larry Rosenstocks out there. If we want to change public education, we can't just help obvious winners. We need to help unknowns emerge and work to make the system respond to them."

Paying Attention to the Results

Even before settling on the small-schools strategy, Vander Ark had started developing an evaluation capacity to track the effectiveness of the money he was spending. His chosen evaluator was Professor Jeffrey Fouts of Seattle Pacific University. Fouts formed the Washington Schools Research Center, which gathered performance data and conducted on-site studies of the districts and schools that received the first grants in Washington state. Fouts also served as a close advisor to Vander Ark and his bosses at the foundation.

The foundation also hired Ferrero, a newly minted Ph.D. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as research director. A trained philosopher, Ferrero's job was to figure out how to evaluate the foundation's national small-schools initiatives. His work led to the commissioning of several studies (including a $5 million project led by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Stanford Research Institute (SRI)) that evaluated how the grants changed school and classroom practice, avoiding the black-box assessment model that looked for direct links between foundation investments and student learning. So far the studies have focused on what stalls small-school creation and whether instruction becomes richer and more personalized in small-school settings.

Though they do not break new theoretical ground, these studies have identified problems of implementation and have already had a profound influence on the foundation's strategy. Fouts told them early, for instance, that Washington State grants to transform big high schools into many small ones were floundering and that grantee school districts were at best neutral toward schools trying to redesign themselves. Early results also called into question the foundation's original approach to district change, which was to engage superintendents and district staff in deep conversations about the need for higher performance. As a former superintendent, Vander Ark knew that the big-school habit was deeply ingrained; he was not sure whether districts would support or disrupt attempts to create small schools. Fouts was finding that, indeed, superintendent support is seldom enough and that superintendents are much better at talking as if they were in favor of small schools than at taking steps to make them possible.

At the same time, the studies came to question the foundation's investment in coaching, a progressive approach that assumes that with a little help school staff can find the solutions to their problems. They became more certain of the need for structural changes in the district, including the alteration of some union rules.

The foundation also paid attention to scholars and journalists who visited Gates-supported high schools. They too reported that the project-based schools sponsored by the foundation were proving difficult to reproduce and hard to make work for young people who had not connected to school. One expert who visited some schools summed up the problem by describing a scene that was common to progressive schools created under the umbrella of many early Gates grants: "A bright Ivy League graduate working with a teenage boy in a wool hat trying to get him interested in doing some sort of project."

Adding Choice to the Mixture

In response to these early reports, the foundation broadened its thinking without necessarily abandoning the ideas and people it had started with. It became, in the words of one senior staff member, agnostic about instruction and less

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wedded to progressivism. It also relaxed its beliefs about the need to work through school districts and became more open to alternative methods of providing public education. Vander Ark, always personally in favor of charter schools, finally persuaded the foundation to support a Washington state charter-school bill. In late 2001 the foundation also gave $1 million to the Brookings Institution for the National Working Commission on School Choice, which I led, seeking to pull the teeth of ideology from the choice debate.

The foundation itself underwent a major change of emphasis in 2002. Though Vander Ark and other senior foundation staff believed that competition could stimulate improvement, the Gates were initially reluctant to make common cause with right-wing advocates of market solutions. However, the foundation gradually stretched its grant portfolio to include market-friendly ideas, making multimillion-dollar grants to groups seeking to start charter schools throughout the country (for example, Aspire Schools and LaRaza). It even gave to the Jesuits' Cristo-Rey, a purely private network of high-performing schools for disadvantaged students. The foundation also supported early-college high schools that put students into higher education courses after 10th grade. These organizations promoted small schools and personal attention to students, but they used traditional forms of instruction that would horrify the progressive educators who received most of the early small-schools grants.

In 2002 and 2003 the foundation also transformed its staffing and internal processes. Earlier, education staff members and outside advisors were people with whom Vander Ark had worked when he was superintendent in Federal Way. The new staff members included Ferrero; James Shelton, a McKinsey consultant, MBA, and former president of Learn Now, a charter-school management company; former Clinton administration official David Lane; and Stefanie Sanford, a White House fellow and former senior staffer to Governor Rick Perry of Texas.

Vander Ark also reorganized the staff into teams for research, policy, and advocacy, and he recruited knowledgeable resident staff members in each of the six states where the foundation does most of its work (Washington, California, Illinois, New York, Ohio, and North Carolina). Shelton, Vander Ark, and other senior foundation staff also work closely with Bridgespan, a nonprofit consulting group created by Bain and Company, a global management consulting firm. They chose Bridgespan precisely because, in one staffer's words, "It constantly challenges us rather than simply repackaging our thinking and feeding it back to us."

As a result, the days of quick decisions and multimillion dollar grants worked out during a taxi ride are gone. But so are Tony Wagner and other progressives who held such sway in the formative years. Grants to progressives continue, but they are more than balanced by grants for new charter schools, research on charters and choice in general, and on accountability and performance-based funding of education.

The change from grants to school districts and from progressive programs toward choice, competition, and eclecticism about instruction is obvious. But it looks more dramatic from outside the foundation than from within. Even in the earliest days, Vander Ark said that the foundation would work with folks on both sides of the education-reform fence, helping existing public schools and districts whenever possible but also making sure they came under competitive pressure. Even today, only about one-third of Gates's education funding is directly linked to charter schools and choice. School districts still get big grants, and the foundation still supports progressive initiatives like High Tech High and Ed Visions, a group of charter schools run as teacher cooperatives. The foundation is also making big investments in school-finance reform and other issues of concern to governors and school superintendents. For example, the Center on Reinventing Public Education, which I lead, received $6 million for a thorough rethinking of state school-finance policy. The foundation put $11 million into a traditional curriculum-centered reform in San Diego, in partnership with groups that prefer to help the existing system, like the Broad and William and Flora Hewlett foundations. But it has also joined with mayors and

The foundation also supported early-college high schools that promoted small schools and personal attention to students. But they used traditional forms of instruction that would horrify the progressive educators.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

independent organizations that prefer to challenge the system. Gates now collaborates with the Walton, Pisces, and Bradley foundations in supporting new charter school developers and research on choice. It has funded numerous projects in collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has long worked both within and in opposition to the system.

One of the Gates Foundation's most consistent collaborators is the New Schools Venture Fund, which provides venture capital for new charter-school operators. Fund founder Kim Smith has become a major influence on Vander Ark's thinking, both directly and through James Shelton, who once worked with Smith.

Today, the foundation is working to fit all its investments into one framework, which is a portfolio-based public school system.

A Much Broader Agenda

Versions differ, but most would agree that the foundation has moved on several fronts, from utopian to pragmatic, from progressive to agnostic, and from person-focused to system-focused. As David Ferrero commented, "We probably wouldn't have considered a grant to KIPP [the Knowledge Is Power Program, a middle-school model for disadvantaged youth that is anything but progressive] in 2001, but by 2004 we gave it $8 million."

That last change tells a lot about how the foundation operates today. It is working to fit all its investments into one framework, which is a portfolio-based public-school system. Vander Ark envisions a system in which public authorities oversee schools but do not run them, and Gates Foundation money is directed toward projects that fit that vision. The job of a local school board would be to provide a variety of schools to meet the needs of a diverse community. Schools would receive public support only if they performed and parents chose them. In order to maintain its own freedom of action, the school board would encourage potential new school providers and avoid making permanent commitments of any kind.

The foundation's version of the portfolio concept is eclectic and leaves room for some managed instruction—mandated use of instructional methods in particular subjects—of the kind Alan Bersin and Anthony Alvarado put in place in San Diego. In the past two years it has pursued the portfolio idea via grants to school districts and reform organizations. The idea is to create new schools to serve the most disadvantaged students, via mixtures of chartering, contracting-out, and internal district reform. Some grants are very large: $82 million to support New York City chancellor Joel Klein's new schools-redevelopment effort, including $25 million to the city's independent New Visions for Public Schools for new school development; $13 million to support Chicago mayor Richard Daley's Renaissance 2010 new schools initiative, including $6 million to the University of Chicago; $14 million to support a total overhaul of Oakland's city schools, driven by the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools. The foundation has also made similar grants to less-prominent cities, such as $5 million to Rochester, New York, public schools.

The portfolio framework is decidedly centrist, and it contains elements that will alternately please and confound almost everybody. At times it seems that the foundation has forced the idea of managed instruction into its portfolio model. Managed instruction was influenced by the highly standardized program of reading instruction developed by Bersin and Alvarado in San Diego and by the reading program Rod Paige imposed on the Houston schools. The idea is definitely in tension with the market-based elements of family choice and the constant creation of new schools to compete for students. No one knows how these competing elements of the foundation's portfolio framework will work together. The rationale for the instructional mandate echoes Paige's: if few schools are teaching reading well and there are approaches that are known to be effective, why not require all schools to use them?

The only point of view consistently left out is that of old-fashioned organized labor, which, under the portfolio district scheme, could not control teacher hiring and placement with a single district-wide contract. Unions, of course, can be a major roadblock to reform, and it will be interesting to see how Gates handles them.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Road to Bold

As with its other initiatives, the foundation is likely to pursue its new programs confidently, via a series of grant solicitations that offer generous funding in return for a pledge from the school or the district to meet certain requirements. The foundation is also working much more aggressively to change public policy concerning key elements of the portfolio approach: transparency in school finance, multiple independent school providers, and performance-based accountability. Through well-publicized partnerships with elected officials like Chicago mayor Richard Daley and through Bill and Melinda Gates's personal advocacy for their high-school agenda in such forums as the National Governors Association and the National Economic Club, the foundation has signaled its intention to leverage its investments through policy change.

Moreover, the foundation's attitude will reflect Vander Ark's belief that nobody has to work with us, but those that choose to do so know what we expect. The new grants to Chicago and New York, for example, came only after senior public officials committed themselves to the portfolio strategy. Moreover, much of the money goes to independent groups like New York's New Visions Schools that will advance the portfolio strategy even if public officials waver. This posture, which critics compare to the stereotypical, tinhorn school principal's statement, "It's my way or the highway," serves an important purpose. The Gates Foundation doesn't know whether its current initiatives are exactly right, but it wants to learn from them, and it expects to adapt in light of experience. This can't happen if today's initiative isn't really implemented.

Vander Ark, the Gates, and other foundation leaders don't expect to get everything right, but they don't expect to go away, and they say they won't get defensive about the problems of their past initiatives. The Gates Foundation is still looking for the breakthrough education program—the instructional method, the way of organizing a school, the way of using money—that will lead to dramatic improvement in outcomes for the most disadvantaged children in America. It expects to make some messes along the way; it does not expect to keep everyone happy all the time. It is, in short, a private philanthropic initiative playing aggressively in a very public arena.

Paul T. Hill is professor of public affairs, the University of Washington, and a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Now Available from AERA

Review of Research in Education
Volume 28 (2004)
Robert E. Floden, Editor

Special issue on *Brown*'s influence on education and education research: critical insights, uneven implementation, and unanticipated consequences

Members: $15.00 ♦ Nonmembers: $48.00 ♦ Institutions: $67.00
Plus Shipping

Complementary Methods for Research in Education
2nd Edition
Richard M. Jaeger, Editor

An AERA classic, based on the audiotape series
Alternative Methodologies in Educational Research

Members: $20.00 ♦ Nonmembers: $36.00 ♦ Institutions: $36.00
Plus Shipping

Order online at the AERA Bookstore:
http://www.aera.net/AERAShopper/
Or e-mail *subscriptions@aera.net*
Purchase Your Copies Today!

Forthcoming in March 2006

Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research
Judith L. Green, Gregory Camilli, & Patricia B. Elmore, Editors

Look for this book at the San Francisco meeting.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN GHIGLIONE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Acting White"

The social price paid by the best and brightest minority students

"Go into any inner-city neighborhood, and folks will tell you that government alone can't teach kids to learn. They know that parents have to parent, that children can't achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white."

—Barack Obama, Keynote Address, Democratic National Convention, 2004

Acting white was once a label used by scholars, writing in obscure journals, to characterize academically inclined, but allegedly snobbish, minority students who were shunned by their peers.

Now that it has entered the national consciousness—perhaps even its conscience—the term has become a slippery, contentious phrase that is used to refer to a variety of unsavory social practices and attitudes and whose meaning is open to many interpretations, especially as to who is the perpetrator, who the victim.

I cannot, in the research presented here, disentangle all the elements in the dispute, but I can sort out some of its thicker threads. I can also be precise about what I mean by acting white: a set of social interactions in which minority adolescents who get good grades in school enjoy less social popularity than white students who do well academically.

My analysis confirms that acting white is a vexing reality within a subset of American schools. It does not allow me to say whose fault this is, the studious youngster or others in his peer group. But I do find that

BY ROLAND G. FRYER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the way schools are structured affects the incidence of the acting-white phenomenon. The evidence indicates that the social disease, whatever its cause, is most prevalent in racially integrated public schools. It's less of a problem in the private sector and in predominantly black public schools.

With findings as potentially controversial as these, one wants to be sure that they rest on a solid base. In this regard, I am fortunate that the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Adhealth) provides information on the friendship patterns of a nationally representative sample of more than 90,000 students, from 175 schools in 80 communities, who entered grades 7 through 12 in the 1994 school year. With this database, it is possible to move beyond both the more narrowly focused ethnographic studies and the potentially misleading national studies based on self-reported indicators of popularity that have so far guided the discussion of acting white.

The Meaning of the Phrase

Though not all scholars define acting white in precisely the same way, most definitions include a reference to situations where some minority adolescents ridicule their minority peers for engaging in behaviors perceived to be characteristic of whites. For example, when psychologist Angela Neal-Barnett in 1999 asked some focus-group students to identify acting-white behavior, they listed actions that ranged from speaking standard English and enrolling in an Advanced Placement or honors class to wearing clothes from the Gap or Abercrombie & Fitch (instead of Tommy Hilfiger or FUBU) and wearing shorts in winter!

Only some of these behaviors have a direct connection to academic engagement. However, as the remarks of Barack Obama, who would later win a seat in the United States Senate, suggest, it is the fact that reading a book or getting good grades might be perceived as acting white that makes the topic a matter of national concern. Indeed, negative peer-group pressure has emerged as a common explanation for the black-white achievement gap, a gap that cannot be explained away by differences in demographic characteristics alone. If minority students today deliberately underachieve in order to avoid social sanctions, that by itself could explain why the academic performance of 17-year-old African Americans, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), has deteriorated since the late 1980s, even while that of nine-year-olds has been improving. It may also help us understand the shortage of minority students in most elite colleges and universities.

Ethnography vs. Statistics

But is this well-publicized aspect of African American peer-culture reality or urban legend? Most ethnographers who examine school life in specific locations present acting white as a pervasive fact of high-school life for black adolescents. But the only two quantitative studies that analyze data from nationally representative samples of high-school students dismiss it altogether as cultural lore. My findings confirm the existence of acting white among blacks as well as among Hispanics, but offer important qualifications about its pervasiveness.

Although they did not coin the term (its origins are obscure), it was an ethnographic study by anthropologists Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu, published in the *Urban Journal* in 1986, that did the most to bring it to the attention of their fellow academics. Their "Capitol High," a pseudonym for a predominantly black high school in a low-income area of Washington, D.C., had what the researchers said was an "oppositional culture" in which black youth dismissed academically oriented behavior as "white."

In the late 1990s, Harvard University economist, Ron Ferguson, found much the same thing in quite another setting, an upper-class suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, called Shaker Heights. Although that city had been integrated for generations, large racial disparities in achievement persisted. When Ferguson detected an anti-intellectual culture among blacks in the local high school, Shaker Heights became virtually synonymous with the problem of acting white.

Fordham and Ogbu traced the roots of the "oppositional culture" to institutionalized racism within American society, which they contend led blacks to define academic achievement as the prerogative of whites and to invest themselves instead in alternative pursuits. Other observers, however, place the blame for acting white squarely on the shoulders of blacks. The Manhattan Institute's John McWhorter, for example, contrasts African American youth culture with that of immigrants (including blacks from the Caribbean and Africa) who "haven't sabotaged themselves through victimology." These two theories, the former blaming acting white on a racist society, the latter on self-imposed cultural sabotage, have emerged as the predominant explanations for acting white among American blacks.

In fact, however, shunning the academic is hardly the exclusive prerogative of contemporary African American culture. James Coleman's classic work *The Adolescent Society*, published in 1955, identified members of the sports teams and cheerleaders, not those on the honor role, as the most popular students in public schools. (See an excerpt from Coleman's original *Harvard Education Review* article, p. 40.) The former bring honor to the entire school, reasoned the University of Chicago sociologist; the latter, only to themselves. Since Coleman, ethnographers have found similar tensions between self-advancement and community integration. Indeed, variants on acting white have been spotted by ethnographers among the Buraku outcasts of Japan, Italian

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

immigrants in Boston's West End, the Maori of New Zealand, and the British working class, among others.

Even so, the question remains whether the tension that Coleman identified is more severe in some cultural contexts than others. On this topic, two sets of scholars weighed in with quantitative studies based on nationally representative surveys. Writing in 1998 in the *American Sociological Review*, James Ainsworth-Darnell of Georgia State University and Douglas Downey of Ohio State University reported that anti-intellectualism is no more severe a problem among black or Hispanic adolescents than it is among whites. Meanwhile, in a 1997 study, economists Phillip Cook of Duke and Jens Ludwig of Georgetown found that high-achieving black students are, if anything, even more popular relative to low-achieving peers than are high-achieving whites.

Of course, it is possible that the social rewards for achievement do not vary among ethnic groups in the United States. But both studies, each of which is based on data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), have a common shortcoming in that they depend solely on a self-reported measure of personal popularity. The NELS contains a question that asks if the student "thinks others see him/her as popular." The answer choices are: very, somewhat, or not at all. Unfortunately, when students are asked to judge their own popularity, they can be expected to provide a rosier scenario than is warranted.

For black and Hispanic students who attend private school, I find no evidence of a trade-off between popularity and achievement.

New Data and Methods

Fortunately, the Adhealth data I used in this study allow me to measure popularity in a more subtle way. All the students surveyed were asked to list their closest male and female friends, up to five of each sex. I first counted how often each student's name appeared on peers' lists. I then adjusted these raw counts to reflect the fact that some friends count more than others. The more frequently a peer is listed by others, the more weight I assign to showing up on his or her list.

The advantage of this research strategy is that one never has to ask a student about his or her own popularity. Students' natural tendency to brag, in this case by listing popular students as their friends, only gives us a more accurate picture of the school's most desirable friends. Students listed as a friend by many peers who are themselves popular, rise to the top of the social hierarchy. Those who are listed by only a few peers, who in turn have few admitted friends, stand out as the marginal members of the community.

Armed with an objective measure of social status, I could examine more systematically whether or not the ethnographers were correct in identifying a distinctive acting-white phenomenon within African American communities. Do high-achieving minority students have fewer, less-popular friends than lower-achieving peers? How does this compare with the experience of white students?

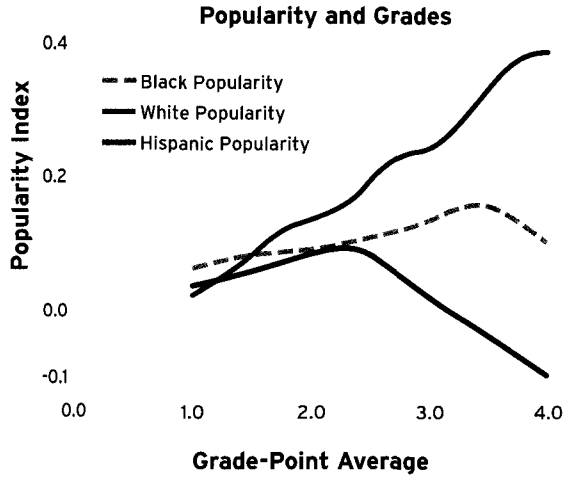
I first report my findings using a measure of each student's popularity within his or her own ethnic group, as that is the most direct test of the acting-white hypothesis. But as I explain below, I obtain the same set of results when I analyze the data without regard to the friends' ethnicity.

I measure student achievement with a composite of grade-point average (GPA) based on student self-reports of their most recent grades in English, math, history/social studies, and science. When comparing the popularity of high- and low-achieving students, I compare students only with students who attend the same school, ensuring that the results are not skewed by unmeasured characteristics of specific schools. Even then, I take into account a number of factors, measured by the survey, that could affect popularity differently for students from different ethnic backgrounds. These factors include parental education and occupation and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pressure to Be Average (Figure 1)

The popularity of white students increases as their grades increase. For black and Hispanic students, there is a dropoff in popularity for those with higher GPAs.



Note: A grade of 1.0=D; 4.0=A

SOURCE: Author's calculations from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data

participation in various school activities, such as varsity sports, student government, and cheerleading.

Finally, to subject my findings to the strongest possible test, I adjust students' popularity to reflect variation in self-reported effort in school. Recall that some types of acting-white theory say that students are penalized only for trying hard, not for achievement per se. The bright kid who can't help but get good grades is not subjected to scorn. It's the plodding rate busters with books constantly in their faces who are annoying. By adjusting for the effort students are putting into their studies, I do my best to separate the social consequences of achievement from those of effort to achieve.

New Evidence of Acting White

Even after taking into account many factors that affect student popularity, evidence remains strong that acting white is a genuine issue and worthy of Senator Obama's attention. Figure 1, which plots the underlying relationship between popularity and achievement, shows large differences among whites, blacks, and Hispanics. At low GPAs, there is little difference among ethnic groups in the relationship between grades and popularity, and high-achieving blacks are actually more popular within their ethnic group than high-achieving whites are within theirs. But when a student achieves a 2.5 GPA (an even mix of Bs and Cs), clear differences start to emerge.

As grades improve beyond this level, Hispanic students lose popularity at an alarming rate. Although African Americans with GPAs as high as 3.5 continue to have more friends than those with lower grades, the rate of increase is no longer as great as among white students.

The experience of black and white students diverges as GPAs climb above 3.5. As the GPAs of black students increase beyond this level, they tend to have fewer and fewer friends. A black student with a 4.0 has, on average, 1.5 fewer friends of the same ethnicity than a white student with the same GPA. Put differently, a black student with straight As is no more popular than a black student with a 2.9 GPA, but high-achieving whites are at the top of the popularity pyramid.

My findings with respect to Hispanics are even more discouraging. A Hispanic student with a 4.0 GPA is the least popular of all Hispanic students, and Hispanic-white differences among high achievers are the most extreme.

The social costs of a high GPA are most pronounced for adolescent males. Popularity begins to decrease at lower GPAs for young black men than young black women (3.25 GPA compared with a 3.5), and the rate at which males lose friends after this point is far greater. As a result, black male high achievers have notably fewer friends than do female ones. I observe a similar pattern among Hispanics, with males beginning to lose friends at lower GPAs and at a faster clip, though the male-female differences are not statistically significant.

Potential Objections

Could high-achieving minority students be more socially isolated simply because there are so few of them? The number of high-achieving minority students in the average school is fewer than the number of high-achieving white students. To see whether this disparity could explain my findings, I adjusted the data to eliminate the effect of differences in the number of students at each school with similar GPAs. This adjustment, however, did little to temper the effect of acting white.

It might also be hypothesized that high-achieving minority students are able to cultivate friendships with students of other ethnic groups. If so, I should obtain quite different results when I examine popularity among students of all ethnic groups. While one finds some evidence that high-achieving students are more popular among students of other ethnicities, the increment is not enough to offset the decline in popularity within their own ethnic group—a predictable finding, given that black and white students have only, on average, one friend of another ethnicity, and Hispanics just one and a half.

Indeed, when minority students reach the very highest levels of academic performance, even the number of cross-ethnic friendships declines. Black and Hispanic students with a GPA above 3.5 actually have fewer cross-ethnic friendships than those with lower grades, a finding that seems particularly troubling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally, I examined whether high-achieving blacks and Hispanics can shield themselves from the costs of acting white by taking up extracurricular activities. There are many opportunities in schools for students to self-select into activities, including organized sports, cheerleading, student government, band, and the National Honor Society, that should put them in contact with students with similar interests.

Unfortunately, when I look separately at minority students who participate in each of these activities, I find only one within which ethnic differences are eliminated: the National Honor Society. Among students involved in every other activity, new friends made outside the classroom do not make up for the social penalties imposed for acting white.

A Private-School Edge

The patterns described thus far essentially characterize social dynamics of public-school students, who constitute 94 percent of the students in the Adhealth sample. For the small percentage of black and Hispanic students who attend private school, however, I find no evidence of a trade-off between popularity and achievement (see Figure 2). Surprisingly, white private-school students with the highest grades are not as popular as their lower-achieving peers. The most-popular white students in private schools have a GPA of roughly 2.0, a C average.

These data may help to explain one of the more puzzling findings in the research on the relative advantages of public and private schools. Most studies of academic achievement find little or no benefit of attending a private school for white students, but quite large benefits for African Americans. It may be that blacks attending private schools have quite a different peer group.

The Segregated School: Is It an Advantage?

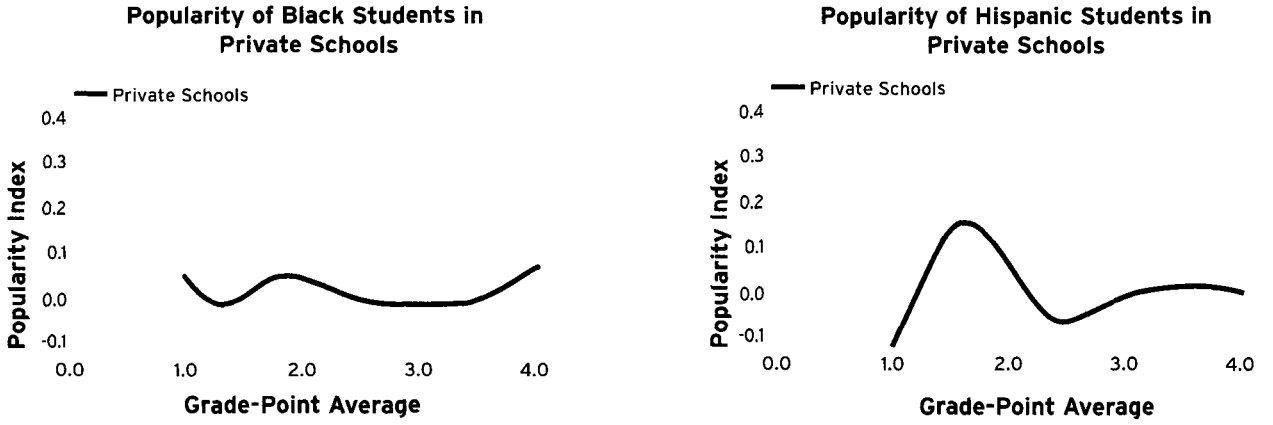
I also find that acting white is unique to those schools where black students comprise less than 80 percent of the student population. In predominantly black schools, I find no evidence at all that getting good grades adversely affects students' popularity.

But perhaps this changes when school desegregation leads to cross-ethnic friendships within the school. To see how the degree of internal integration within a school affects acting-white patterns, I calculated the difference from what I would expect in the total number of cross-ethnic friends in a school based on the ethnic make-up of the student body. Schools with a greater percentage of cross-ethnic friendships than expected are considered to be internally integrated. I divide schools into two groups of equal size: those with higher and lower degrees of internal integration.

Unfortunately, internal integration only aggravates the problem. Blacks in less-integrated schools (places with fewer than expected cross-ethnic friendships) encounter less of a trade-off between popularity and achievement. In fact, the effect of acting white on popularity appears to be twice as large in the more-integrated (racially mixed) schools

The Private-School Advantage (Figure 2)

For black and Hispanic students, the adverse effect of good grades on popularity disappears in private schools.



Note: A grade of 1.0=D; 4.0=A

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health data

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as in the less-integrated ones. Among the highest achievers (3.5 GPA or higher), the differences are even more stark, with the effect of acting white almost five times as great in settings with more cross-ethnic friendships than expected. Black males in such schools fare the worst, penalized seven times as harshly as my estimate of the average effect of acting white on all black students!

This finding, along with the fact that I find no evidence of acting white in predominantly black schools, adds to the evidence of a "Shaker Heights" syndrome, in which racially integrated settings only reinforce pressures to toe the ethnic line.

The effect of acting white on popularity appears to be twice as large in the more-integrated schools as in the less-integrated ones.

In Search of an Answer

That acting white is more prevalent in schools with more interethnic contact hardly passes the test of political correctness. It nonetheless provides a clue to what is going on. Anthropologists have long observed that social groups seek to preserve their identity, an activity that accelerates when threats to internal cohesion intensify. Within a group, the more successful individuals can be expected to enhance the power and cohesion of the group as long as their loyalty is not in question. But if the group risks losing its most successful members to outsiders, then the group will seek to prevent the outflow. Cohesive yet threatened groups—the Amish, for example—are known for limiting their children's education for fear that too much contact with the outside world risks the community's survival.

In an achievement-based society where two groups, for historical reasons, achieve at noticeably different levels, the group with lower achievement levels is at risk of losing its most successful members, especially in situations where successful individuals have opportunities to establish contacts with outsiders. Over the long run, the group faces the danger that its most successful members will no longer identify with its interests, and group identity will itself erode. To forestall such erosion, groups may try to reinforce their identity by penalizing members for differentiating themselves from the group. The penalties are likely to increase whenever the threats to group cohesion intensify.

Applying this model of behavior to minority and white students yields two important predictions: A positive relationship between academic achievement and peer-group acceptance (popularity) will erode and turn negative, whenever the group as a whole has lower levels of achievement. And that erosion will be exacerbated in contexts that foster more interethnic contact. This, of course, is exactly what I found with regard to acting white.

Understanding acting white in this way places the concept within a broader conceptual framework that transcends specific cultural contexts and lifts the topic beyond pointless ideological exchanges. There is necessarily a trade-off between doing well and rejection by your peers when you come from a traditionally low-achieving group, especially when that group comes into contact with more outsiders.

Alternative Explanations

Such a conceptualization is preferable to both of the two theories that have so far dominated discussions of acting white: the notion of oppositional culture and the allegation of cultural self-sabotage.

The oppositional culture theory, developed by Fordham and Ogbu in the wake of their experiences at "Capitol High," accounts for the observed differences between blacks and whites as follows: (1) white people provide blacks with inferior schooling and treat them differently in school; (2) by imposing a job ceiling, white people fail to reward blacks adequately for their academic achievement in adult life; and (3) black Americans develop coping devices which, in turn, further limit their striving for academic success. Fordham

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Ogbu suggest the problem arose partly because white Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that black Americans were capable of intellectual achievement and partly because black Americans subsequently began to doubt their own intellectual ability, began to define academic success as white people's prerogative, and began to discourage their peers, perhaps unconsciously, from emulating white people in striving for academic success.

However plausible it sounds, the oppositional culture theory cannot explain why the acting-white problem is greatest in integrated settings. If Fordham and Ogbu were correct, the social sanctions for acting white should be most severe in places like the segregated school, where opportunities are most limited. The results of my studies, of course, point in precisely the opposite direction.

The notion that acting white is simply attributable to self-sabotage is even less persuasive. According to its proponents, black and Hispanic cultures are dysfunctional, punishing successful members of their group rather than rewarding their success. That theory is more a judgment than an explanation. A universal, it cannot explain the kinds of variations from one school setting to another that are so apparent in the data I have explored.

The Need for New Identities

How important are these social pressures? Although that story has yet to be fully told, in my view, the prevalence of acting white in schools with racially mixed student bodies suggests that social pressures could go a long way toward explaining the large racial and ethnic gaps in SAT scores, the underperformance of minorities in suburban schools, and the lack of adequate representation of blacks and Hispanics in elite colleges and universities.

Minority communities in the United States have yet to generate a large cadre of high achievers, a situation as discouraging as the high incarceration rates among minorities who never finish high school. In fact, the two patterns may be linked. As long as distressed communities provide minorities with their identities, the social costs of breaking free will remain high. To increase the likelihood that more can do so, society must find ways for these high achievers to thrive in settings where adverse social pressures are less intense. The integrated school, by itself, apparently cannot achieve that end.

Roland G. Fryer is assistant professor of economics, Harvard University and a faculty research fellow, the National Bureau of Economic Research.

National Charter School Clearinghouse
Linking you to more answers!

www.NCSC.info
An organization devoted to the national dissemination of information on charter schools:

"Your passion for students is supported by NCSC"

Resources
Research
News
Funding
FAQs
and more

CHARTER SCHOOL SERVICE DIRECTORY

The nation's **first** and **only** online yellow pages for charter schools

Reach customers quickly & economically in this directory designed for the charter school community

www.NCSC.info/services

FREE Registration
Subscribe at
www.NCSC.info

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

World Wide *Wonder?*

Measuring the (non-)impact of Internet subsidies to public schools

Like the television revolution, which brought electronic boxes into schools in the 1960s and was supposed to turn classroom teaching on its head, computers were rolled into schools in the 1990s and connected to the worldwide web with the expectation that education would never be the same. TVs never really caught on as chalkboard replacements. Although they are still around, they seem to be used primarily as "educational film" filler by substitute teachers. The wired computer invasion has been very different. We never saw classrooms filled with rows of children sitting in front of televisions. And there was no national Marshall Plan to close the "television gap." The Internet, in fact, was something of an answer to the "vast wasteland" of TV; and it came with such promise for education that a new national anxiety, the "digital divide," was born and with it a rush of educators and philanthropists wanting to make sure that the poor would not be shut out of the worldwide promised land.

The best evidence of the concern over the digital divide was the speed with which the federal government interceded to help close it. A program offering generous subsidies to schools and libraries for the purchase of Internet technology was made part of the massive overhaul of the Telecommunications Act in 1996. (In Internet time, this was almost prehistory: Amazon and eBay didn't open their online doors until 1995, and Google was still two years from birth.) The subsidies were apportioned on a sliding scale, with poorer schools receiving more. Known as the E-Rate (education rate) program, the schools and libraries subsidy was funded by a tax on long-distance telephone service. It quickly became the most ambitious federal school technology program in history.

"Because of the E-Rate," gushed Vice President Al Gore in May of 1997, "our children will not be stranded in the high-rent districts of cyberspace. We now can go from a world where most teachers don't even have phones to a world where all teachers can help their students talk to the world. Our nation has taken a great step forward in closing the gap between the information haves and the information have-nots."

The first E-Rate subsidies were distributed in 1998, in time to reach schools for the 1998–99 academic year. As applications increased, funding grew from $1.7 billion in

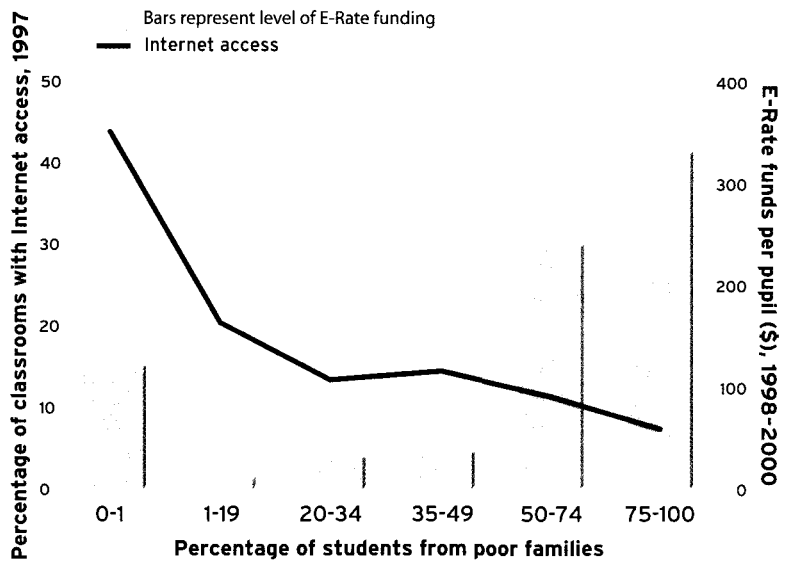
BY AUSTAN GOOLSBEE AND JONATHAN GURYAN

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPHER MACNEIL

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Money Where It's Needed (Figure 1)

The bulk of E-Rate funds in California during the program's first three years went to low-income school districts, which had previously lacked Internet access.



SOURCE: Authors' calculations from California Department of Education data

1998–99 to $2.1 billion in 2000–01, very near the maximum allowed by statute, which was (and remains) $2.25 billion per year. The program's size was staggering, especially considering that total public-school spending on computers in 1999 (including hardware, software, training, networking) was only $3.3 billion.

Many of the supporters of the E-Rate program, including former Secretary of Education Richard Riley, expected the program to do more than simply wire schools. To be successful, Riley said, E-Rate "must show that it really makes a difference in the classroom, and that means helping students learn the basics and other core subjects."

Billions of dollars in subsidies later, we can make some tentative conclusions about the effectiveness of the E-Rate program: whether it has, as Al Gore predicted, closed the gap between the "information haves and information have-nots," and whether it fulfilled its promise, as Richard Riley demanded, to make "a difference in the classroom." The conclusions are a mixed bag.

California Here We Come

To find out what happened to the E-Rate program, we turned our attention to California. With fully 13 percent of the public-school enrollment in the United States, California provides a large enough sample to allow for informative conclusions about the program. Better yet, it is also the *only* state that kept comprehensive records of school computer and Internet access *before* the enactment of the E-Rate initiative. We thus have a very valuable point of comparison to gauge E-Rate's impact on Internet access and student test performance. We analyzed data beginning with the 1996–97 school year, before E-Rate, and ending with the 2000–01 year, when the program's onset and initial growth make it easiest to measure its impact.

Before the implementation of E-Rate, the digital divide cut sharply through California's public-school system. Our data indicate that schools with the most affluent student bodies, where less than 1 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, already had Internet access in roughly one-half of their classrooms during 1996–97. In contrast, schools with 75 percent or more of their students eligible for the lunch program had a mere 8 percent of classrooms wired (see Figure 1).

The good news about the E-Rate program is that it clearly helped to narrow the digital divide among schools (see Figure 2). Offered Internet technology for lower prices, public schools responded by purchasing more. Because the E-Rate subsidies were more generous for schools likely to lag behind in technology adoption, gaps in access to Internet technology narrowed.

The bad news, though, is that the additional investments in technology generated by E-Rate had no immediate impact on measured student outcomes.

The Right Spending Spurs

Outcomes aside, the E-Rate program seems to be a model for how to induce school "reform" through a scaled incentive system. It did not provide preselected technology to schools or cover 100 percent of the price when schools made their own purchases. Instead, E-Rate subsidized schools' purchases of approved technology. Requiring schools to foot part of the bill, it was believed, would encourage them to make only those purchases that they saw as having some value to them.

During the period covered in our study, the subsidy rate under E-Rate ranged from 20 to 90 percent, depending on the share of students who qualify for the national school-lunch program and whether the school is classified as rural. For example, an urban or suburban school with between 35 percent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At least in the short run, there is no evidence whatsoever that schools with E-Rate subsidies learn over time how to use Internet technology in a way that improves test scores.

and 49 percent of its students eligible for the national school-lunch program would receive a 60 percent subsidy; an investment of $1,000 in approved technologies would cost the school only $400. The same $1,000 investment for an urban school with more than 75 percent of its students eligible for school lunches would cost just $100. The subsidies for rural schools were slightly higher to reflect their higher costs of getting connected.

Schools were able to draw on E-Rate funding to support purchases of any commercially available services and equipment that had the primary purpose of delivering telecommunication and Internet access to classrooms or other places of instruction. This included basic telephone service, Internet access, a high-speed T1 line, telecommunications wiring, routers, and switches. Schools could not, however, receive subsidies for things like software or computers that were not connected to the Internet.

Schools could apply for the program individually or as part of a district-wide application. The subsidy rate for districts was based on the average share of students eligible for school lunches across all schools included in the application. The rules required that local administrators "strive to ensure that each school receives full benefit of discount to which entitled."

Between the 1998 and 2000 school years, California received almost $937 million in E-Rate subsidies, or more than 20 percent of the entire national subsidy to public schools in that period. California E-Rate funding increased sharply in 2000–01, rising from $254 million to $475 million, due entirely to the $230 million in E-Rate funding that the Los Angeles Unified School District received that year.

A Gold Rush of Megabytes

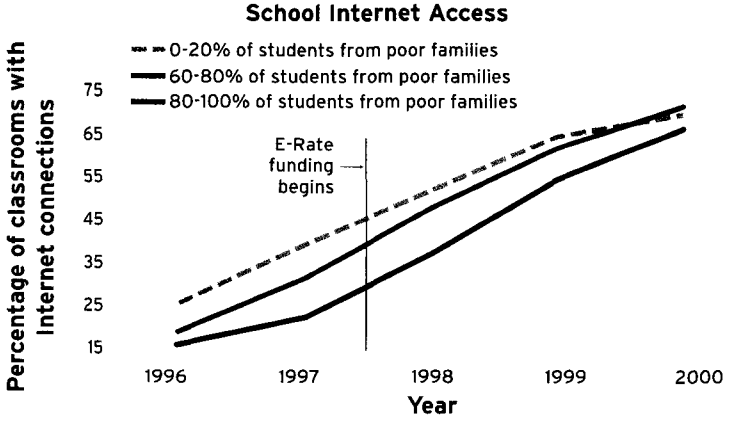
Internet access in California public schools increased considerably after E-Rate was introduced. A database maintained by the state's department of education since 1996–97 contains information about the number of classrooms in each school that were connected to the Internet. During the 1997–98 school year, the year before the first E-Rate funding was awarded, only 55 percent of California's 8,186 public schools had any Internet connections in classrooms. Using the number of teachers in each school as a rough proxy for the total number of classrooms lets us estimate the percentage of classrooms with connections: a quarter of classrooms in California had Internet access.

As the E-Rate funds grew, Internet access became more widespread. By 2000–01, 85 percent of California schools had at least one classroom with Internet access, while two-thirds of all classrooms in California had such access.

The simultaneous increase of Internet access and the advent of E-Rate funding do not, of course, prove that it was E-Rate that improved access, as there was already a clear upward trend in the fraction of public schools with Internet access before the E-Rate program began. According to data from surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, the share of public-school classrooms nationwide with access to the Internet increased fivefold from 1994 to 1996 (from 3 percent in 1994 to 15 percent in 1996), followed by continued growth through 1999 (51 percent in 1998 and 63 percent in 1999). Similarly, our data from California indicate that Internet access in California classrooms increased by 53 percent between the 1996–97 and 1997–98 school years (from 17 percent to 26 percent of classrooms). The spread in Internet access before E-Rate suggests that, even in the absence of the federal subsidy, many schools would have chosen to make Internet investments.

Closing the Digital Divide (Figure 2)

After the implementation of E-Rate, the gap in Internet access between wealthy and poor California schools closed substantially.



SOURCE: Authors' calculations from California Department of Education data

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Closing the Digital Divide

Did the federal government spend billions of dollars to encourage Internet investment that would have happened anyway? Another common concern about E-Rate is that rich schools might receive the lion's share of the subsidy money, despite having a lower subsidy rate, because they have more funds available for computer and Internet investment.

Our data, however, confirm that E-Rate funding in California through 2001 went disproportionately to schools with higher poverty rates. During the first three years of the E-Rate program, school districts with 50 percent or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and subsidy rates of 80 and 90 percent, received almost 90 percent of all public-school funding (see Figure 1). There was some distortion in the very wealthiest sections of the state: the 10 percent of districts with less than 1 percent of their students eligible for the federal-lunch program received, on average, seven times as much funding per pupil as districts with between 1 and 20 percent of students eligible ($127 and $17, respectively). The poorest districts, however, received substantially more funding per pupil than even the richest schools. Schools with 75 percent or more of their students eligible for the lunch program received the most funding per pupil: $341.

The additional spending by poorer districts during E-Rate's first three years dramatically narrowed the digital divide. During the 1996–97 school year, districts with the highest poverty rates had the lowest percentage of their classrooms online. Over the next year (and still before the E-Rate program) this gap grew even wider. Once the E-Rate program began in 1998, however, the poorest schools, which had the largest subsidy rates, accelerated their adoption of Internet technology, and the gap between rich and poor schools began to close (see Figure 2).

Subsidized Investment

These patterns suggest that E-Rate worked as intended to encourage new Internet investments within the poorest districts, but they do not rule out the possibility that some other difference between poor and rich schools was responsible for the convergence. We therefore also examined how each school's rate of growth in the percentage of rooms connected changed annually from 1996–97, two years before any subsidies were awarded, through 2000–01.

If, all other things being equal, schools with larger potential subsidy rates increased their Internet capacities by more than schools with lower potential subsidy rates, we would have strong evidence that the subsidies were the incentive to increase investment.

When making these comparisons, we also controlled for any effects of differences in the fraction of students in a school eligible for the federal school-lunch program. As mentioned above, schools with more school lunch–eligible students were actually spending less on Internet technology before E-Rate's implementation. Nonetheless, including this poverty measure enabled us to differentiate the more rapid growth we would expect among higher-poverty schools as they play catch-up and the slowing of investment among higher-income schools as they near full Internet access for their school.

We found that the bigger the subsidy, the more a school increased its growth rate of Internet access over what it would have invested without the subsidy. On average, a 10 percent increase in the E-Rate subsidy led to a 1.36 percent increase in the number of classrooms with Internet access per year. If a school with average Internet growth before E-Rate had received no subsidy between 1996–97 and 2000–01, our results indicate that only about 40 percent of classrooms would have had Internet access by the 2000–01 school year. In fact, access at this same school with the subsidy was 66 percent of classrooms online, or 68 percent higher than expected.

All schools did not respond to the incentive in the same way. Rural schools proved to be much less responsive to the subsidy program than urban schools, perhaps because they faced higher prices for Internet services or were unable to get the T1 broadband at all, which would have meant that their total cost for new investment would have been greater despite their having higher subsidy rates. Primary and middle schools (all those with no students in grades 10–12) saw an especially large increase in investment in Internet technology in response to the incentive; the response among high schools was smaller. Finally, schools that are heavily black and Hispanic were more responsive to the subsidy than schools with mostly white and Asian student bodies. Perhaps schools with larger minority populations were more budget constrained and therefore more responsive to the subsidy rate.

Student Achievement

E-Rate spurred schools to invest more in the Internet, and by that measure it was a great success. But did improved Internet access boost student achievement, as many of its strongest proponents had hoped? To answer this question, we gathered data on each school's performance on the Stanford Achievement Test (not to be confused with the SAT or Scholastic Aptitude Test given to

The bigger the subsidy, the more a school increased its growth rate of Internet access over what it would have invested without the subsidy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

high schoolers), which has been administered to public school students in California since the 1997 school year. For each of the six subjects tested—math, reading, science, language, spelling, and social studies—we calculated three separate measures of school-level achievement: the mean test score in the school, the fraction of students scoring above the 75th percentile score for the nation, and the fraction of students scoring above the 25th percentile score for the nation.

Using these measures, we examined whether schools with high subsidy rates improved their performance more than schools with lower subsidy rates. Since schools receiving high subsidies increased their percentage of classrooms with Internet-accessible computers at a greater rate than low subsidy schools in response to E-Rate, the results should tell us whether the additional online classrooms due to E-Rate resulted in higher test scores.

We initially looked for the impact on student performance in the year following the onset of the program (and of any changes in the school's subsidy rate thereafter). This one-year lag allows time for the technology to be set up within the school, for teachers to integrate the technology into the curriculum, and for students to use the technology.

For all six subjects, each of our estimates of the effects of the subsidy was very small; none was statistically different from zero, indicating that E-Rate did not have a large effect on student test scores. For schools in the typical district, which was eligible for a 63 percent subsidy, we can reject with 95 percent confidence the possibility that E-Rate increased test scores by one-tenth of a standard deviation.

But could improved access to the Internet have improved education with more than a one-year lag? In fact, when we looked at the program's impact after two years, the estimated effects go down, not up. At least in the short run, there is no evidence whatsoever that schools with E-Rate subsidies learn over time how to use Internet technology in a way that improves test scores.

Of course, it is always possible that improved access to the Internet enhanced students' learning in ways that do not show up on standardized tests. For the few nontest outcomes we have, though, such as the probability of taking advanced classes, the share of graduates going into the University of California system, and the overall dropout rate, we found no significant impact of Internet connections on student performance. (It was probably a stretch to expect to find the impact of technology subsidies on most of these variables anyway, given that we saw no significant effect on Internet subsidies for high schools.)

E-Rate may have failed to boost student achievement measurably for any number of reasons. For one, this technology may not help measurable student achievement, though it may build skills that are unmeasured by standard tests. An equally plausible explanation is that people simply did not use the technology once they got it. This would certainly be consistent with a 1999 U.S. Department of Education survey, which found that only one-third of teachers reported that they were well prepared or very well prepared to use computers and the Internet. Without direct evidence of teachers' use of time in the classroom, we can only estimate the effect of Internet *access* and not of Internet use.

The Internet itself, though, seems unlikely to be a silver bullet for solving the problems of America's public schools.

It is also possible that technology improved student achievement after more than a two-year lag. Even if there were a large benefit to Internet investment that we cannot yet measure, however, we should not view a delayed effect as having no cost. The subsidy costs more than two billion dollars per year, and the subsidies may lead schools to get locked into inferior technologies or, at the least, lead them to buy at higher cost (given the extremely rapid declines in the price of computer-related goods). Consider that almost 80 percent of total E-Rate funds were allocated to "Internal Connections," which includes the cost of wiring schools. Had the subsidy not accelerated investments, many schools could have avoided the costs of physical infrastructure by using the now-common (and inexpensive) wireless networks.

Conclusions

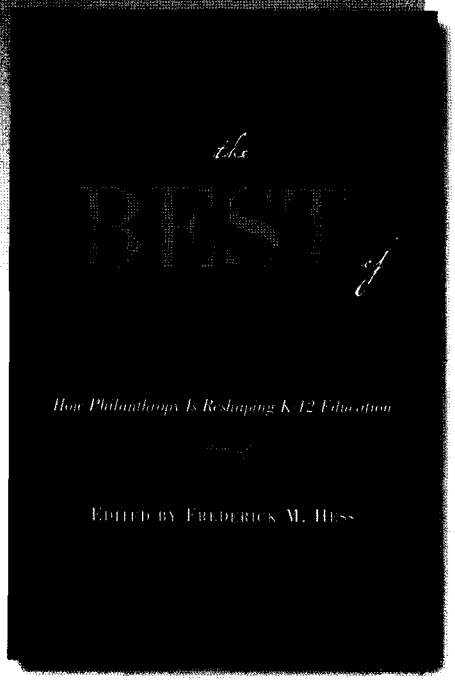
Judged solely as a policy to close the digital divide, the E-Rate program registers as a success. The E-Rate subsidy led to substantial increases in Internet investment in California's public schools. With the important exception of rural schools, which did not respond to the subsidy, the funding went disproportionately to schools on the low side of the digital divide, as it was supposed to. By the end of the 2000 school year, three years after the E-Rate program granted its first subsidies, the program had increased the number of California public-school classrooms with Internet access by 68 percent. Judged as a means of improving student performance, however, the E-Rate has shown little success on any testable measure.

In the end, the E-Rate program has helped get basically every school in the country hooked up to the Internet. The Internet itself, though, seems unlikely to be a silver bullet for solving the problems of America's public schools.

Austan Goolsbee is professor of economics and Jonathan Guryan associate professor of economics, the Graduate School of Business, University of Chicago. They are research associate and faculty research fellow, respectively, at the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). *This article is adapted from a study that will appear in* The Review of Economics and Statistics.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW! *from Harvard Education Press . . .*



October 2005, 360 pages
Paperback $29.95 / ISBN 1-891792-65-2
Library $59.95 / ISBN 1-891792-66-0

What role does philanthropy play in K-12 education?

How much private funding is devoted to public education?

What kinds of programs does this funding support?

What roles have philanthropists played in advancing school reform?

What challenges must foundations face in order to contribute effectively to K-12 education?

With the Best of Intentions is a pioneering effort to address these questions, which until now have rarely been examined. Bringing together a mix of researchers and practitioners, it surveys the current landscape in philanthropic giving to education, examines the major goals of recent philanthropic efforts, and looks at some of the key lessons — for educators, philanthropists, policymakers, and community leaders — of philanthropic contributions to schools and school systems.

FREDERICK M. HESS is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and executive editor of *Education Next*. He is the editor of *Urban School Reform: Lessons from San Diego* and coeditor of *A Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom*, both published by Harvard Education Press.

To order a copy, call
1-800-513-0763
or visit us online at
http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hepg

"This volume invites the sincere reflections and heated discussions that are urgently needed among policymakers, educators, and the philanthropic community as educational philanthropy increasingly seeks to improve our nation's schools."

— STEFANIE SANFORD, BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Harvard Education Press
8 Story Street
Cambridge MA 02138
Tel. 617-495-3432
Fax. 617-496-3584

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Does the presence of charters spur public schools to improve?

Friendly Competition

Most research on charter schools, and the most intense public debate over their desirability, has focused on the impact of these new schools on the students who attend them. But charter proponents also hope that the threat of students' leaving will spur traditional schools to higher levels of achievement. In the long run, such system-wide improvements, if positive, could even outweigh any negative effects on the individual students they enroll.

Can competition from a new kind of public school, right around the block or down the road in many cases, inspire traditional schools to improve? We address this question here by examining the link between the establishment of charter schools in North Carolina and average student proficiency rates at the traditional public schools most affected by the new source of competition.

Our use of proficiency rates, an aggregate measure of school performance, distinguishes our work from other recent studies that examine the performance gains made by individual students. However, aggregate school performance is the focus of state accountability systems, is reported in the media, and presumably is used by parents, along with their own observations of their child's progress, to evaluate the quality of their child's school. Schools intent on retaining students can be expected to concentrate their efforts on this indicator.

Ironically, there could be a disjunction between that aggregate and the average performance of individuals at the school, for a variety of reasons. Schools affected by competition could encourage low-performing students not to take the test, could focus their efforts exclusively on students at the cusp of proficiency, or could use any number of strategies to achieve the appearance of improved performance without ensuring that students were actually learning more.

Our results indicate that traditional public schools in North Carolina responded to even the limited competition provided by charter schools by improving their average proficiency rates. However, a comparison of our results with those of other studies that examine the learning gains made by individual students suggests the need for caution in interpreting our results as unambiguously positive.

BY GEORGE M. HOLMES, JEFF DESIMONE, AND NICHOLAS G. RUPP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Friendliest of Rivalries

In three short years, from the 1996–97 school year to that of 1999–2000, the final year of our analysis, the number of charter schools in operation in North Carolina rose from zero to 74. By 2004–05, the number had grown to 99; state law currently caps the total number of charter schools at 100. Because the effects of competition on the performance of traditional public schools can be identified best during periods in which the amount of competition is changing, these years offer a convenient way to test the effects of expanded school choice.

Of course, school choice was not altogether absent in North Carolina even before 1997–98. It was largely limited to choosing to live in a particular district, enrolling a child in a private school, or educating the child at home, all of which require a substantial investment of resources, fiscal or otherwise. Roughly 70 percent of districts also offered parents some degree of choice among public schools or the option of applying to a magnet school. Our results should therefore be interpreted as the effect of the introduction of additional competition from charter schools.

As in most states, students in North Carolina can leave a traditional public school and enroll in a charter, at will and for no monetary cost. Charter schools may not discriminate among students by ability, socioeconomic status, or eligibility for special education. Even so, there are reasons to suspect that the amount of additional competition provided by charter schools is relatively modest. Despite the rapid growth in the number of charter schools in the state, the 12,000 students enrolled in charters in 1999–2000 represented just 1 percent of North Carolina's 1.25 million public-school students. Moreover, before granting a charter, sponsors must consider local impact statements prepared by the district in which the school will be located. Perhaps for this reason, many charter schools in North Carolina target at-risk students and presumably do not pose a competitive threat to traditional public schools. Finally, research conducted by Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd ("Results from the Tar Heel State: Charter Schools and Student Achievement," *research*, Fall 2005) indicates that North Carolina charter schools during this period may have been less effective in improving student achievement than were traditional public schools, at least for students who attended both charter and traditional public schools between grades 4 and 8. Although it is not clear that parents would have an accurate perception of charter schools' effectiveness, particularly in the early years of the state's program, all these factors, taken together, indicate that North Carolina provides an unusually stiff test of the theory that charter schools will spur improvement among traditional public schools.

Despite the rapid growth in the number of charter schools in the state, the 12,000 students enrolled in charters in 1999-2000 represented just 1 percent of North Carolina's 1.25 million public school students.

Measuring Performance and Competition

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction began testing students at the end of each school year in 1996–97 as part of its ABCs of Public Education program. These tests are taken statewide by all students in grades 3 through 8 in math and reading, and in grades 4 and 7 in writing. We take as our indicator of each school's performance its performance composite for grades 3 through 8, which the state computes as the percentage of tests taken in all three subjects that meet the state's proficiency standard. Since the performance composite is widely reported by the media, schools have strong incentives to improve their rating.

The influence of a nearby charter school on traditional public schools in the area depends, in part, on the credibility of students' threats to switch to the charter. Those threats become more credible as the distance between the schools decreases. Since charter schools charge no tuition, travel costs are the major component of the price of attending one, especially in North Carolina, where charter schools are not required to provide transportation.

We therefore base our measures of the extent of charter competition facing each traditional public school on the school's distance from the nearest charter school. We first map the latitude and longitude of traditional public schools and charter schools throughout the state, identify the charter school closest to each traditional public school, and compute the aerial distance between the two. Then we develop separate

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

indicators for each school of whether there is a charter school within 5 kilometers, 10 kilometers, 15 kilometers, 20 kilometers, and 25 kilometers.

We exclude from the analysis schools, mostly in rural areas, with addresses we were unable to map and schools with missing test performance measures for any year during our study period, which spans 1996–97 to 1999–2000. These exclusions represented about 7 percent of the total. We also drop schools located in three North Carolina Outer Banks counties with substantial water boundaries because straight-line distance is a poor proxy for actual travel time to and from these localities. The analysis includes all of the remaining 1,307 traditional public schools in the state.

The average performance composite among traditional public schools increased from 67 percent in 1996–97 to 75 percent in 1999–2000 as the number of charter schools in the state increased from 0 to more than 70. Meanwhile, after the first charter schools opened in 1997–98, the average distance from a school to the closest charter school fell by about one-third, from 19.2 miles to 12.6 miles in 1999–2000. Is there a connection between these improvements in test-performance scores and growing competition from charter schools?

Results

To answer this question we examine whether the annual changes in performance made by traditional public schools during this period were more positive in schools with charter schools nearby than in schools not facing charter school competition. In these comparisons, we take into account changes in the characteristics of the student body including the percentage of students who are Hispanic, the percent African American, and the percent eligible for the federal free lunch program, as well as changes in the school's student-teacher ratio. We also use information on the school's performance composite two years before the year to correct for measurement error in the school's previous-year performance. Finally, we perform separate comparisons using each of our distance-based indicators of charter-school competition.

These comparisons provide consistent evidence that charter-school competition raises the performance composite of traditional public schools. The effect is statistically significant for four of the seven measures of charter-school competition and falls just short of significance for the other three. In each case, the results indicate that, all else being equal (including the school's score on the performance composite the previous

POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

PSQ is the most widely read and accessible journal of public and international affairs. Published continuously since 1886 by the Academy of Political Science, ***PSQ*** presents authoritative analysis essential to understanding today's complex world.

PSQ publishes in-depth articles on both domestic and foreign affairs, with each issue containing some 35 book reviews. Moreover, the ***Quarterly***'s editorial advisory board is composed of outstanding scholars from the nation's leading universities and think tanks.

If you haven't been reading ***PSQ***, you've missed articles and book reviews by world-class scholars, including essays on education such as *Schoolyard Revolutions: How Research on Urban School Reform Undermines Reform* by Joseph P. Viteritti and *Urban Education Reform and Minority Political Empowerment* by Stefanie Chambers.

Subscribe and receive free online access to *PSQ*'s fully searchable archive, dating back to 1996.

*"Most serious journals are narrow; most journals which are broad in scope are not serious. **PSQ** is the exception: a journal which is both broad in scope and serious in content. It is must reading for social scientists and informed citizens interested in public affairs."*

SAMUEL HUNTINGTON
Harvard University

SUBSCRIBE TO ***PSQ*** BY JOINING THE ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State _____ Zip _____

Send to:
THE ACADEMY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 1274
New York, NY 10115-1274
Tel (212) 870-2500 • Fax (212) 870-2202

ACADEMY MEMBERSHIP
❑ $49, 1 year ❑ $32, student
❑ Check enclosed.
❑ Charge my: ✧ AMEX ✧ Visa ✧ MasterCard
Outside USA add $8/year.
Card # _____
Exp. Date _____
Signature _____

Visit *PSQ*'s website at http://www.psqonline.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

year), the presence of charter-school competition increases traditional school performance by about 1 percent. This represents more than one-half of the average achievement gain of 1.7 percent made by public schools statewide between 1998–99 and 1999–2000 and is, from a policy perspective, nontrivial.

How nontrivial? One indication comes from the information in our results about the gains in performance made by schools where the student-faculty ratio decreased over this same period. In 2002 the North Carolina governor's office proposed a $26 million increase in the state budget to reduce average class size by roughly 1.8 students. Although the relationship between changes in the student-teacher ratio and changes in school performance is not statistically significant, the size of the relationship suggests that the governor's plan would increase scores by roughly 0.36 percentage points. However, our data indicate that opening a charter school would increase public-school test scores by one full point (1.0). Expanding the number of charter schools therefore seems like a promising, and far more cost-effective, alternative to lowering class size. Since state funding follows the student, an increase in the charter-school system requires no increase in spending.

Even a little bit of competition from charter schools can force schools to appear to be improving, but policymakers need to take care to ensure it translates into real gains for the average student.

One possible alternative explanation for the improvements observed in traditional public schools when a charter school opened nearby is the migration of lower-performing students from the traditional public school to the charter school. However, simple tests we conducted, based on changes in the average previous-year test scores of students in schools affected and unaffected by charter-school competition, suggest that, if anything, the *opposite* phenomenon occurred: students switching from traditional public to charter schools appear to have been *above*-average performers compared with the other students in their school. The fact that traditional public schools experienced net gains in performance, despite a slight decrease in average student quality, suggests that our estimates of the effects of charter-school competition may understate the true effect of charters on traditional public schools.

A Word about Other Studies

The findings presented here differ from those of two previous studies that examine the same hypothesis for North Carolina charter schools. The research by Robert Bifulco and Helen Ladd fails to find an effect of charter schools on the effectiveness of traditional public schools, while a similar analysis by one of us conducted in 2003 reported improvements for students in traditional public schools smaller than the ones estimated here. There are several possible explanations for these differences.

Most important, each of the other studies uses student-level data, which we did not have access to when conducting this research. How could schools improve their performance composite scores without a change in the average gains in achievement made by their students? As discussed above, one possibility is that schools affected by competition would target students who score just below the proficiency cutoff. Roughly 3 percent of students in any given year fail by only one point. If a principal were, for example, to entice one-third of such students to gain a single point, the performance composite would increase by a full percentage point, but the average student-level gain would be tiny and could even be offset by losses made by students safely above or below the proficiency cutoff. Our other research indicates that students in schools affected by competition at or near the proficiency cutoff did in fact make the largest gains.

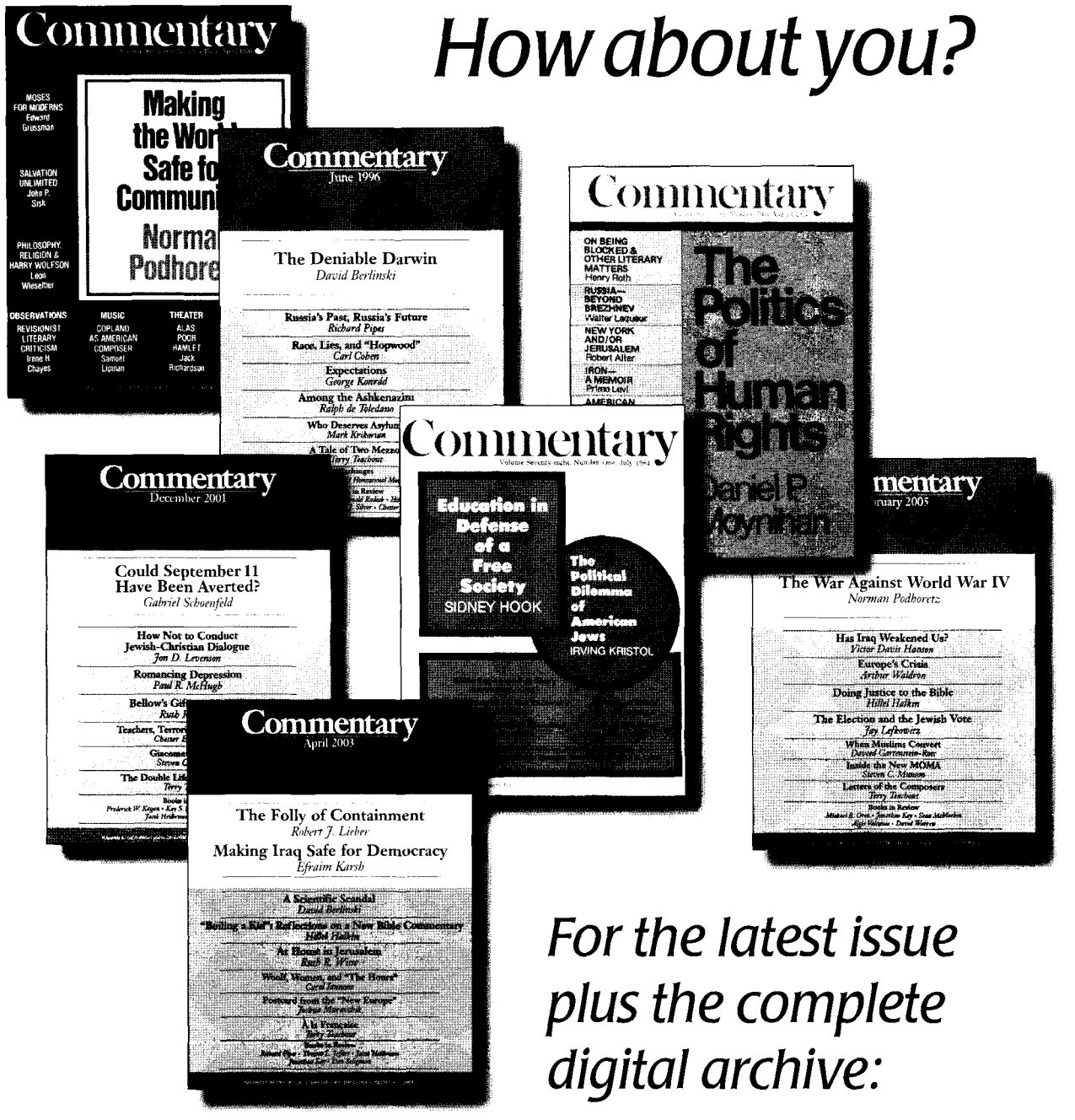
In short, our results reveal substantial improvements in traditional public-school performance due to the introduction and growth of charter-school choice. Read alongside the results of studies based on student-level data, they suggest that even a little bit of competition from charter schools can force schools to appear to be improving, but that policymakers need to take care to ensure that translates into real gains for the average student.

George M. Holmes is a research fellow in health economics and finance at the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, University of North Carolina; Jeff DeSimone is assistant professor of economics, University of South Florida, and faculty research fellow, National Bureau of Economic Research; Nicholas G. Rupp is assistant professor of economics, East Carolina University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hundreds of thousands of people use **Commentary**'s website every month.

How about you?



For the latest issue plus the complete digital archive:

WWW.COMMENTARYMAGAZINE.COM

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If the World Is Flat

Why Does American Education Go in Circles?

The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century.

By Thomas L. Friedman.

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005, $27.50; 488 pages.

Reviewed by Michael J. Petrilli

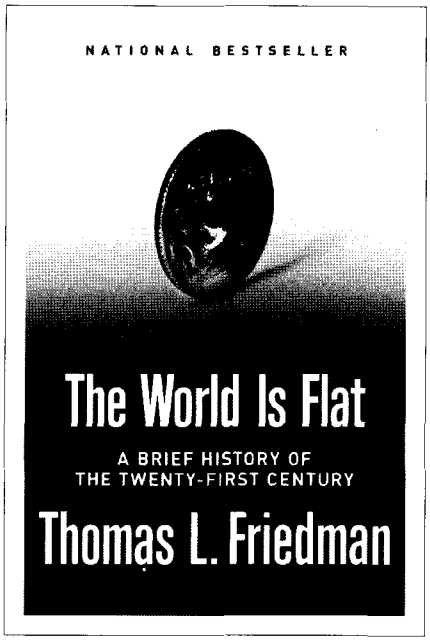
Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* could have been the most influential prod to education reform since *A Nation at Risk*. The elements are all there: a growing foreign challenge (then, Japan; now, China and India); a new world of opportunity and competition (then, for American companies; now, thanks to the Internet, for individual Americans); and an inadequate response on our part (then, "a rising tide of mediocrity"; now, a grave shortage of math and science graduates). Again and again, Friedman hints at the need for bold education reform as he makes his case for greater competition in the marketplace, fewer labor restrictions, and lower barriers to trade. But after spending 300 pages hinting at a bold education-reform plan, he never pulls the trigger. Like the foreign aid efforts he criticizes, when it comes to education, he's all promise, no delivery.

The book is not, of course, explicitly about education, but about globalization. According to Friedman, the convergence of advanced technologies, new ways of doing business, the removal of economic and political obstructions, and the rapid introduction of millions of young Chinese, Indian, and East European professionals into the world economy has dramatically leveled, or "flattened," the global playing field. Overwhelmingly, Friedman finds this to be a positive development, opening up opportunities for billions more people to tap their full potential, boost their prosperity, and live their dreams, while creating an explosion of inventions and innovations that will benefit us all. Americans with the knowledge, skills, and adaptability to compete in this newly flattened world can look forward to a utopian future, full of interesting work and a rising standard of living.

Can We Get Ahead by Standing Still?

But what about Americans without a command of higher-level skills, or those whose work can be easily digitized? Just as many good-paying manufacturing jobs went offshore in the 1970s and 1980s, so too will many professional jobs head overseas in the years to come, if they aren't eliminated altogether by technology. From calculating taxes and evaluating insurance claims to reading CAT scans and providing PowerPoint help to busy executives, work is heading to India, China, Poland, and other countries where labor is cheaper and, perhaps most unsettling, quality is often higher.

Americans, Friedman argues, cannot assume that we will maintain our comfortable lifestyle while standing still. He describes Bill Gates's thoughts on the "ovarian lottery": 30 years ago, if you had a choice between being born a genius in Bombay or average in Poughkeepsie, you would have chosen Poughkeepsie, because your chances of enjoying a decent life were greater there. Now, in the new plugged-in, interconnected, flat world of 2005, Gates says, "I would rather be a genius born in China than an average guy born in Poughkeepsie." Microsoft and other companies will search the globe for talent, and wherever they find it—



China, or India, or anywhere else—high-paying, challenging jobs will follow. The Indian company Infosys, for example, one of the primary beneficiaries of off-shoring, received *one million* applications last year for 9,000 technology jobs. Meanwhile, a Microsoft executive explains, "Remember, in China when you are one in a million, there are 1,300 other people just like you." As Friedman says, "Have a nice day."

How can we ensure that our children are ready to compete and succeed in this new flat world? Obviously, education is key, and Friedman says as much. He tells his own daughters, "Girls, when I was growing up, my parents used to say to me, 'Tom, finish your dinner—people in China and India are starving.' My advice to you is: Girls, finish your homework—people in China and India are starving for your jobs." He lays out the stark numbers to document our education gap: the U.S. now ranks 17th in the number of students receiving science degrees, down from 3rd three decades

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ago; the percentage of scientific papers written by Americans has fallen 10 percent since 1992; the U.S. share of patents has dropped 8 percent since 1980. Then he brings in the big guns, relaying the results of the latest Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): 44 percent of 8th graders in Singapore scored at the most advanced level in math, as did 38 percent in Taiwan; only 7 percent in the United States did.

Forgetting the Punch Line

At this point, my inner school reformer was screaming, "Yes, yes, sock it to 'em, Tom!" After all, this is a book written by a Pulitzer Prize–winning columnist for the world's most influential newspaper, guaranteed a wide and careful reading by millions, including the rich and powerful, and he is about to make a compelling case for urgent and radical school reform. Surely, I thought, he is going to argue that real competition, in the form of charters or maybe even vouchers, would have the same positive, transformative effects on our education system that the liberalization of India's economy has had on its development. Without a doubt, I thought, he will compare our schools' stultifying unions to those of Europe, whose labor markets he derides as "inflexible, rigidly regulated ... full of government restrictions on hiring and firing." Definitely, he will call for a more rigorous focus on the basics; after all, he quotes Bill Gates as saying, "I have never met the guy who doesn't know how to multiply who created software.... You need to understand things in order to invent beyond them." Unquestionably, Friedman will ridicule the whiners who complain that No Child Left Behind is leading to too much homework and too little summer vacation for poor little Susie, while other nations leap ahead. Without a doubt, I was convinced, he will look at this new flat world, where Americans must compete with people not from their own community or state but from all over the planet, and declare our patchwork education system—with its 50 sets of academic standards and tests—no longer up to the challenges at hand and say that the time has come for rigorous national standards and tests, political obstacles be damned.

Alas, my inner school reformer was sorely disappointed. I got to the end of chapter eight, "This Is Not a Test," and could discern only three reform ideas from Friedman: embark on an "all-hands-on-deck, no-holds-barred, no-budget-too-large crash program for science and engineering education"; make community college affordable for everyone; and scold parents into doing a better job. Well, his finger wagging at parents is persuasive: "The sense of entitlement, the sense that because we once dominated global commerce and geopolitics ... we always will, the sense that delayed gratification is a punishment worse than a spanking, the sense that our kids have to be swaddled in cotton wool so that nothing bad or disappointing or stressful ever happens to them at school is, quite simply, a growing cancer on American society. And if we don't start to reverse it, our kids are going to be in for a huge and socially disruptive shock."

But Friedman describes a national crisis, then places responsibility in the home, shielding the education system itself from blame. His solutions are sorely inadequate and massively underwhelming. He even quotes Lou Gerstner, former CEO of IBM: "Transformation of an enterprise begins with a sense of crisis or urgency. No institution will go through fundamental change unless it believes it is in deep trouble and needs to do something different to survive." To which Friedman adds, "It is impossible to ignore the parallel with America as a whole in the early twenty-first century."

But Friedman does ignore the parallel with the education system, and his otherwise masterful book suffers greatly for its failure to address the crisis in schooling. It will be up to others to pick up where he left off, to explain to the nation that our education system, as it is currently configured, is incapable of helping enough of our children develop the high-level knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in today's flat world. Friedman missed a perfect opportunity to connect the dots that he so perfectly draws: remove barriers to competition, inject accountability for results, and eliminate work rules that impede innovation and achievement. If it's good enough for business and for the economic well-being of our country, as Friedman suggests, why not for our education system? Isn't this exactly what our children and grandchildren need in order to have a shot at the good life so many of us have come to take for granted? Indeed, the world is getting flatter. Unfortunately, Thomas Friedman would let our education system fall off the edge.

Michael J. Petrilli is vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and a research fellow at the Hoover Institution. He served in the U.S. Department of Education, 2001–2005.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sex, Drugs—And More Sex and Drugs

The New Adolescent Society

I Am Charlotte Simmons
by Tom Wolfe.

Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2004, $28.95; 688 pages.

Prep
by Curtis Sittenfeld.

Random House, 2005, $21.95; 406 pages.

Reviewed by Diane Ravitch

Many years ago, it was generally acknowledged that sociology had replaced the novel as a social microscope for examining contemporary mores and behavior. Whereas readers in the 19th century looked to writers like Balzac, Dickens, and Trollope for critical insight into the intricacies of social patterns, by the mid-20th century we were looking instead to reports by sociologists to gain similar understanding of our way of life.

Those who wanted to gain insight into adolescent culture in the middle of the 20th century could certainly find intriguing novels, like John Knowles's *A Separate Peace*, J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, but such books portrayed highly unusual situations rather than realistic descriptions of the lives of teenagers. For anyone concerned to understand adolescence, a more reliable source was James Coleman's *The Adolescent Society*. (For Coleman's own words, see "The Adolescent Society," this issue, pp. 40-43.) High-school students, he found, had created their own subculture, one that was anti-intellectual and materialistic, wherein they honored athletic prowess, looks, and popularity, but not academic achievement.

Nearly a half century has passed since the publication of Coleman's landmark study, and no sociological work about today's youth has taken its place. Oddly enough, it may be necessary to turn again to fiction to find a representation of youth culture that describes how much has changed since Coleman's era. Two recent books offer a searing critique of adolescent life today, and both are worthy of attention for the portrait that they draw of the culture in which young people are immersed.

Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons* and Curtis Sittenfeld's *Prep* describe life in, respectively, an elite college and an elite boarding school. Both are stories about girls who arrive in an academic setting where they feel out of place because of their family's social status. Lee Fiora attends the highly selective prep school Ault as a scholarship student. Charlotte Simmons is a scholarship student at a Duke-like university called Dupont. Fiora's family is solidly middle class, yet gauche and awkward among the upper-class parents at Ault. Simmons's family is from the mountains, and they are uneducated, dirt-poor, ignorant, and baffled by the sophisticated culture that their daughter Charlotte has joined.

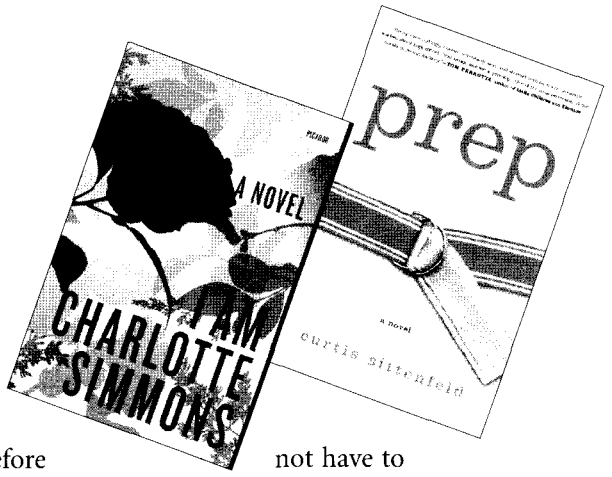
Wolfe Paints a Disturbing Scene

Of the two novels, Wolfe's is by far the more consequential. In a biting satire of student life in higher education today, Wolfe describes, with relentless detail, a debauched culture drenched in alcohol, sex, and play, where athletic prowess is king, and fraternity boys while away the days and nights boozing and notching new sexual conquests. In this milieu, naive Charlotte is nothing more than fresh meat for avaricious males. Within only a few months of her arrival at Dupont, Charlotte has been seduced and abandoned by a handsome but vicious frat boy. As long as she clings to the old-fashioned moral values of her family, she suffers mightily for her sins. In his rich description of the ways that students talk and interact, of their empty values and their lack of idealism, Wolfe serves up an ugly but engrossing depiction of "academic" life in which academics play an insignificant part.

Perhaps not surprisingly, *I Am Charlotte Simmons* set off a loud debate among critics. Some hated it, saying that it was untrue or that it was so obviously true that it was not news. A few, including some younger writers, said that Wolfe had held up a mirror to higher education and captured its essence. I know that I found it engrossing reading. By the time I finished it, I was glad that my children had finished college. If they had not, I would be tempted to home school them or send them to a religious college after reading this book. To the extent that Wolfe has captured reality, it is no wonder that our country must import talent from other nations to enroll in advanced studies in "hard" fields like science and engineering.

Prep is a disappointment. Whereas Charlotte Simmons is a brilliant young woman who wastes her mind and is corrupted by the culture of her classmates, Lee Fiora is a mediocre student who is lazy and cheats on her exams. One wonders why Ault gave Lee a scholarship, as she seems undeserving. She drifts through her four years at Ault, indifferent to her studies, lusting for the most popular boy in the class. When he finally climbs into her bed late one night, she welcomes him. Unlike Charlotte, who loses her values and her idealism, Lee has neither values

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



nor idealism to lose. Teachers and friends try to help Lee, but she is resistant to change and impervious to their efforts. The headmaster of Ault mistakenly permits Lee to be interviewed by a reporter for the *New York Times* for a story about diversity at Ault, and Lee pours out her resentments toward her more accomplished peers. In so doing, she betrays the family that sacrificed to send her to a good boarding school as well as the institution that tried valiantly but fruitlessly to educate her.

What can we learn about student life from these novels? At Ault, teachers are dedicated, classes are rigorous, and student misbehavior occurs but is not condoned. At Dupont University, the academic offerings are splendid, but few of the students seem interested in partaking of the grand intellectual feast spread before them. The university is concerned mainly to keep scandal out of the newspapers, but it turns a blind eye to the casual and constant debauchery that characterizes student life. Sexual encounters—or "hooking up"—have no more significance to students at Dupont than a kiss on the cheek meant to the college students of 40 years ago.

Together these books suggest to this reader that we need a new round of sociological studies of youth. We should not have to rely on novelists to tell us what is happening to the younger generation. And if higher education is, as Wolfe implies, little more than an expensive setting for youthful bacchanalia, then we should be very worried.

Diane Ravitch is research professor of education, New York University, and a member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Forthcoming

GENERATIONAL CHANGE

Closing the Test Score Gap

Edited by Paul E. Peterson

February 2006, 224 pages
0-7425-4609-8 $24.95 paper
0-7425-4608-X $70.00 cloth

Here, Paul E. Peterson draws upon the best available research to examine the various education policy alternatives that will close the black-white achievement gap by 2028—the year when the Supreme Court has mandated that affirmative action in college admissions will end.

"This volume offers an interesting array of conventional and unconventional strategies for school reform. They deserve to be discussed and given a fair trial in practice."
—Diane Ravitch, Research Professor in Education at New York University and Brown Chair in Education Policy at Brookings Institution

Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
4501 Forbes Blvd., Ste. 200 Lanham, MD 20706 • Phone: 1-800-462-6420 • Fax: 1-800-338-4550
Order Online and Save 15% at www.rowmanlittlefield.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Color Me Purple

But don't mention race!

Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School

By Mica Pollock.

Princeton University Press, 2004, $39.95; 268 pages.

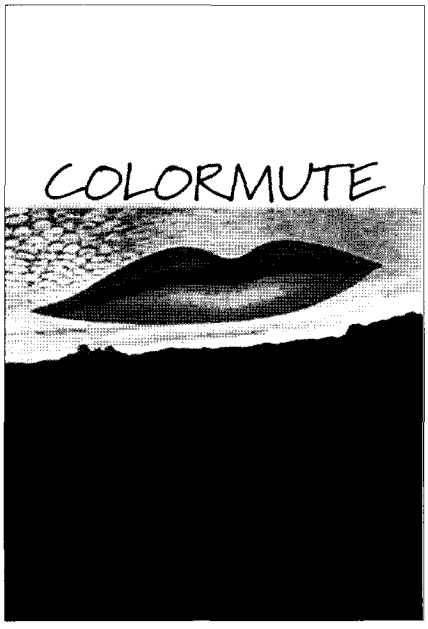
Reviewed by Nathan Glazer

Mica Pollock taught in a California high school for a year in the mid-1990s, then spent another two years in research in the same school as a graduate student in what appears to be social anthropology. (She is now on the faculty of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.) Those were hectic times in this multiracial and multiethnic high school, which she calls "Columbus," and which is located in an otherwise unnamed "California City"—though it is clear from the details of the court case under which all "California City" schools then labored that the city is San Francisco.

While she taught there, the high school, as a failing school, was being "reconstituted" by the central administration. When she returned as a researcher, it was already reconstituted, with a new principal and staff. But these problems did not seem to affect the issues she was studying.

Her concern was with how teachers, administrators, and students talk, or do not talk, about race, and how race comes into their thinking and acting about school issues. Surprisingly, there is very little about how race comes up in classroom teaching, which is a central issue in other books on race in schools. A typical issue is what to do when "nigger" shows up in a class reading from *Huckleberry Finn*. But Columbus High is a rather sophisticated setting when it comes to race: it comprises six ethnic groups (no fewer than nine are identified under the citywide court order, and all nine must be considered in the making of administrative decisions), and its student body is, for all practical purposes, all minority. Officially, the school is 28 percent Filipino, 29 percent Latino, 22 percent African American, 8 percent Chinese, 8 percent other nonwhite (mostly Samoan), and 5 percent other white (just white in common parlance).

The students seem to be of two distinct minds about the subject, and they are quite comfortable with both. On the one hand, their notions about their own race are complex, mixed, and shifting. Many of the students are of mixed origin (this is, after all, the San Francisco region), and they seem to take delight in the fact that their race is often not easily identifiable to others.



They are very direct in talking about race, their own and that of others, and one supposes that "nigger" would not have caused much of a stir at Columbus if it came up in a classroom reading. On the other hand, they accept that the school is composed of the six defined groups and that those groups are often in conflict over such matters as how many of each appear in a representative school event, or in what order, which students become officers in the school, and the like.

Avoiding the R Word

Such sophistication on the part of the students makes the inhibitions of the teachers and administrators seem odd, but especially evocative. The adults are reluctant to speak about race differences in achievement and behavior, and this, the author believes, contributes to the continuance of racial problems. Pollock seems to be asking for more openness in the discussion of these issues, but matters are more complicated than that, and just how one is to be open to questions of race is not easy to discern from her account.

Pollock notes that for the teachers race matters when they talk about students, but not when they talk about their own problems as teachers. They do not seem to take much notice that a majority-white teaching force is teaching a student body with minuscule numbers of "other white" students, nor do they consider what problems this might create for their teaching. Or if they do, it is only in *sub rosa* discussion.

At the city administrative level, where Columbus was considered a failing school, there also seems to be a problem talking about race directly. If Columbus is failing, it is clearly because its black, Latino, and Samoan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

students graduate in small numbers. There is no great problem with the Filipinos, the second-largest ethnic group in the school, and the group dominant in school government and in school achievement. There is no problem with the Chinese, a small group in this school, but dominant academically in the school system citywide. But the problem of who is failing is concealed by the rhetoric of "all students": "all students" can and must learn. The racial issue is left unremarked in the rancorous public meetings over reconstitution, even though it is, in fact, the racial difference in failure that started the whole process.

Between a Rock and Racism

In her extended and interesting accounts of how teachers view the matter, Pollock teeters between acknowledging a range of factors aside from race in accounting for academic success and failure and taking the teachers to task for not directly acknowledging and addressing racial and ethnic groups in those outcomes. But it is not easy to see just what the author would consider a proper response. Consider her reference to research on group inequality in achievement. That research is certainly not mute about race, but that very directness raises problems for Pollock: "Researchers rarely admit that their own matter-of-fact research questions about racial patterns, launched from a distance, are themselves evidence of culturally scripted expectations that achievement be racially ordered—and more important, that such research questions routinely produce culturally scripted explanations for why racial patterns exist."

What is the researchers' failure? They "presume certain racial achievement patterns," Pollock writes. But is it "presumption" when almost all research agrees on the matter? At another point in the book Pollock abashedly notes that these are her own expectations ("presumptions"?) too. "After two years around Columbus, I myself would hear a student coming late to class and anticipate she would be 'black'; I regularly assumed the honor roll lists would largely display names that were either 'Filipino' or 'Chinese.'"

If one speaks about racial failure, it must be within the context of the larger "racial order."

But like the other adults in this book, Pollock too remains silent on the issue: "I just waited quietly for racial patterns to manifest themselves...." In discussing the researchers' failure, Pollack displays the tendency of current social science to concentrate on representations, how matters are seen, as if that were the problem, rather than the underlying realities that give rise to those representations. She seems to want the teachers to recognize and be more straightforward in their talk about racial realities; but she does not want them to acknowledge straightforwardly that blacks, Latinos, and Samoans are the problem. If one speaks about racial failure, it must be within the context of the larger "racial order." One senses that teachers reading this book will think the author gets them coming and going: Be aware of the "racial order," but if you speak about it, you'll probably be doing so the wrong way. Pollock believes that black academic failure, if spoken about directly, simply becomes part of the process of creating and sustaining that failure.

In the end, *Colormute* asks a great deal from teachers and administrators; fair enough. But it also asks them to take on the burden of an analysis that is itself questionable. Would evoking the racial order really help in this situation? Would it not as likely fan resentments and provide excuses that would make education even more difficult?

Yes, we must recognize the role of race and group and of complex history, and we must acknowledge that fault can be variously apportioned. It is a central issue of academic achievement and academic failure. But then, whatever the ultimate analysis, is the task not one of effective instruction for the competencies that society expects from the educated? This, it seems to me, is what is shortchanged in this otherwise sophisticated analysis of the problems of talking about race in school. And in those moments when Mica Pollock recognizes her difficulties in following her own prescriptions, we recognize not only her honesty and good will, but the problem of incorporating the weight of our racial history in our instruction.

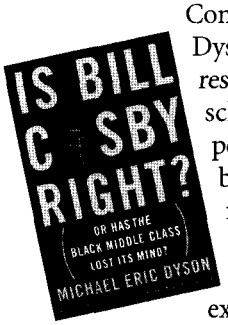
Nathan Glazer is professor of education and sociology emeritus at Harvard University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOK ALERT

Is Bill Cosby Right? Or Has the Black Middle Class Lost Its Mind? Michael Eric Dyson. (Basic Books).

As part of a diatribe against a beloved, thoughtful television personality, the Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania incessantly misleads the reader about the country's schools.

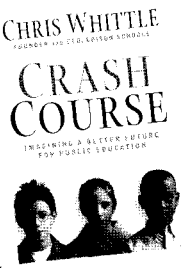


Contrary to what Michael Dyson asserts, "profound resegregation of American schools" has not happened; "telling differences between how much money suburban and urban schools spend on each student" do not exist; African American dropout rates are not 17 percent (but closer to the 50 percent figure that Cosby is accused of getting wrong); and the existence of the phenomenon of "acting white," far from being "a theory that is in large part untrue," has been affirmed by a major new study.

These and other misstatements of fact, tales, and quotes out of context are used to impugn the reputation of a public figure who dared to ask black parents and students to exercise a greater sense of responsibility. Dyson's attack is relentless, though he takes time out to massage his ego with four pages filled with laudatory e-mails said to have been received from juvenile offenders after they had been visited at a detention center. Are young people that uniformly enthusiastic about a university professor? Or did Dyson shrewdly choose his quotes the way writers of dust-jacket copy do?

If Dyson's handling of education, which ranges from selective to misleading to simply false, is an indication of what he gets wrong on other subjects in *Bill Cosby*, then this is a book-burner's delight.

Crash Course: Imagining a Better Future for Public Education. Christopher Whittle. (Riverhead Books).



Chris Whittle launched Edison Schools in 1991, having already prospered with "Channel One," which introduced a specialized (and commercialized) television news show into U.S. high schools.

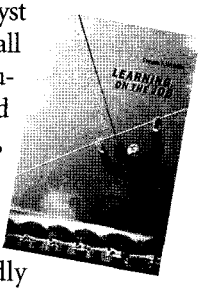
Edison now operates dozens of schools and provides full- and part-time education services to hundreds of thousands of children. It is the biggest and best-known of America's burgeoning education-management organizations (EMOs).

In this book, Whittle distills the lessons he has learned about K–12 education and the changes it needs, lessons that he presents with self-assuredness and passion. (Those who have seen him in action hail him as a preternaturally gifted salesman.)

He goes from suggesting useful incremental changes in today's school system to a dazzling visionary exercise in what that system could be like in 2030, built around very different sorts of school systems and "school companies." Then he sketches a hugely ambitious federal law (the "Education Innovation Act of 2007") to generate the R & D dollars and leadership to move K–12 education from incrementalism to transformation. You can skip the epilogue, though: 25 pages of hokey "letters to leaders" meant to motivate them for the changes ahead.

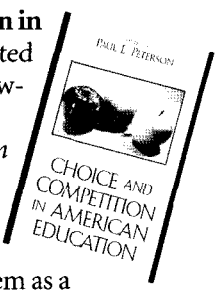
Learning on the Job: When Business Takes on Public Schools. Steven F. Wilson. (Harvard University Press).

In this lucid and engaging analysis of six for-profit education-management organizations, including industry heavyweight Edison and the nonprofit KIPP, Wilson, who was forced out of his position as CEO of Advantage Schools by frustrated investors, is brutally honest about his former company's mistakes. "We had been arrogant," he writes, "and we were humbled." He also proves to be a perceptive analyst of the industry. For all their differences in education philosophy and business strategy, EMOs faced a number of common obstacles: pressures to expand too rapidly and in the wrong places, difficulties finding and financing facilities, and vigorous union opposition.



Wilson remains a long-term optimist about the potential of EMOs to be an agent for reform in American education; he even believes they can turn a profit. But he doesn't think this can happen until states adopt policies providing such organizations with access to capital for facilities at rates comparable to those available to traditional public schools.

Choice and Competition in American Schools. Edited by Paul E. Peterson. (Rowman and Littlefield).



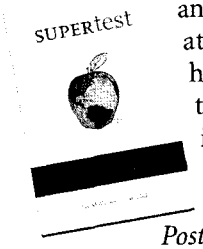
To celebrate *Education Next*'s fifth anniversary, the editors have gathered 23 of the journal's greatest hits and published them as a 250-page volume. The essays describe a wide range of efforts to inject choice and competition into American education. While some of the material on charter schools and vouchers will be familiar, it's convenient to have these multifaceted offerings, which include everything from experimental research

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to first-person accounts, between two covers. Efforts to introduce choice and competition are not limited to choice only *among* schools. Several essays analyze the ways that market incentives and deregulation might be used to get and keep great teachers and principals. Most of the innovations described in this volume make perfect sense, yet face major political obstacles.

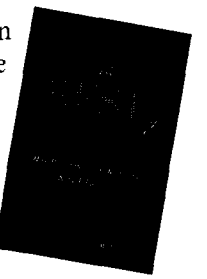
Supertest: How the International Baccalaureate Can Strengthen Our Schools. Jay Mathews and Ian Hill. (Open Court).

The author tells twinned stories, that of the birth and growth of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program around the world and the adoption of IB at a single Virginia high school. While the authorship credit is shared, the voice here is that of veteran *Washington Post* education reporter Mathews rather than that of Hill, deputy director general of the International Baccalaureate Organization. This is a piece of journalism, not organizational puff. It paints a careful history of the international efforts that gave birth to the IB Organization in 1967 and the growth of an IB system that today includes 1,100 high schools worldwide. The author is skeptical of those who question the organization's politics (left-leaning?) and biases (Is it a disadvantage in college admissions?). However, *Supertest* touches on these questions only briefly and doesn't spend much time on policy questions, larger implications, or lessons to be learned. Worth reading as a thoughtful, extended case study of an education system that caught the author's eye as well as for its clear history of the little-understood IB.

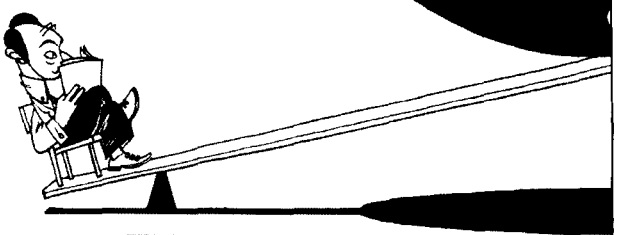


With the Best of Intentions: How Philanthropy Is Reshaping K–12 Education. Edited by Frederick M. Hess. (Harvard Education Press).

This volume of insightful papers, first presented at an American Enterprise Institute conference last April, is better than best intentions. To those 11 AEI contributions (by such competent analysts as Bryan Hassel, Andrew Rotherham, Jane Hannaway, Tom Loveless, Leslie Lenkowsky, Richard L. Colvin, and Jay Greene) Hess has added perceptive introductory and concluding essays. Education philanthropy, he declares, is "disorderly, visible, and little studied." Though dwarfed by public tax dollars, these gifts gain leverage from their own visibility and that of their benefactors, particularly the newer ones such as the Gates and Broad foundations. Hess ends with a thoughtful listing of five "challenges" that are "aggravated by the nature, ambition, and tactics of the emergent 'new' givers." Well worth the attention of reformers and educators, not to mention philanthropists.



Since 2001 *The Common Review* has published essays and reviews for readers interested in the books and ideas that appeal to our best intellectual and ethical values. Our writers deliver tough, street-smart prose that will challenge, amuse, and sometimes offend. That's how we like it. We refuse to allow anyone the luxury of unexamined opinions and print only the finest articles on literature and culture, book reviews, poetry, cartoons and humor. Pick up a copy today and discover why *The Common Review* stands out as the independent magazine of the new public intellectual. Visit www.thecommonreview.org or call 1-800-222-5870 to subscribe today ($17.95US/$24.95CAN) or ask for *The Common Review* at your local bookstore or newsstand.



THE COMMON REVIEW
THE MAGAZINE OF THE GREAT BOOKS FOUNDATION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Foundations Matter

A Detroit boy works to fix the public schools

BY ELI BROAD

I grew up in Detroit, lived in an apartment with my immigrant parents, and walked to Thirkell Elementary, six blocks away. It was a time, the 1940s, when our industrial midwestern city was known as the nation's "Arsenal of Democracy" and had a singular mission: to provide American servicemen with the equipment they needed to win the war and return home to their families.

The city's focused determination and unity of purpose seemed to affect almost everyone. I say "almost" because focused and determined isn't an entirely accurate description of my high-school experience. The truth is, I was an average student at best, more interested in running track and occasionally getting in trouble than focusing on studies.

The truth is, I was an average student at best, more interested in running track and occasionally getting in trouble than focusing on studies.

Basics + Innovation = Success

Even though I goofed off too much, I learned enough of the basics in Detroit's Central High to continue my education at another public institution, Michigan State University, in 1951. MSU changed my life. In contrast to high school, my college professors invited students to challenge their beliefs and question what they read in textbooks. I majored in accounting, with a minor in economics. I remember the lessons of Walter Adams, an economics professor who taught that anyone who developed innovative new products could succeed during the 1950s economic expansion. That may sound like a tame idea now, but 50 years ago it was quite a revolutionary thought for a bunch of public-school graduates far from the traditional centers of American wealth.

As a young accountant I saw people starting businesses and making money, and I knew I could do the same. With a partner and $25,000 borrowed from my father-in-law, I began to build houses and sell them with affordable mortgages, with monthly payments that were less than what people were paying in rent. Today Kaufman and Broad Homes is known as KB Home, and it's one of the largest home builders in the world. I also helped build a retirement savings company, Sun America (now AIG Retirement Services), into a Fortune 500 success.

Giving Something Back

I had a wonderful career in business, built on a lot of hard work, a little luck, and the education foundation I gained at Thirkell, Central High, and MSU. And when I retired six years ago, my wife, Edye, and I wondered how we could best give back our family wealth. That's when I thought again about education. Edye and I knew that the country was fast losing its competitive advantage, and we firmly believed that the cause was lowered standards of education. Too many kids dropped out of school, and too many other countries were rapidly gaining ground and passing us intellectually.

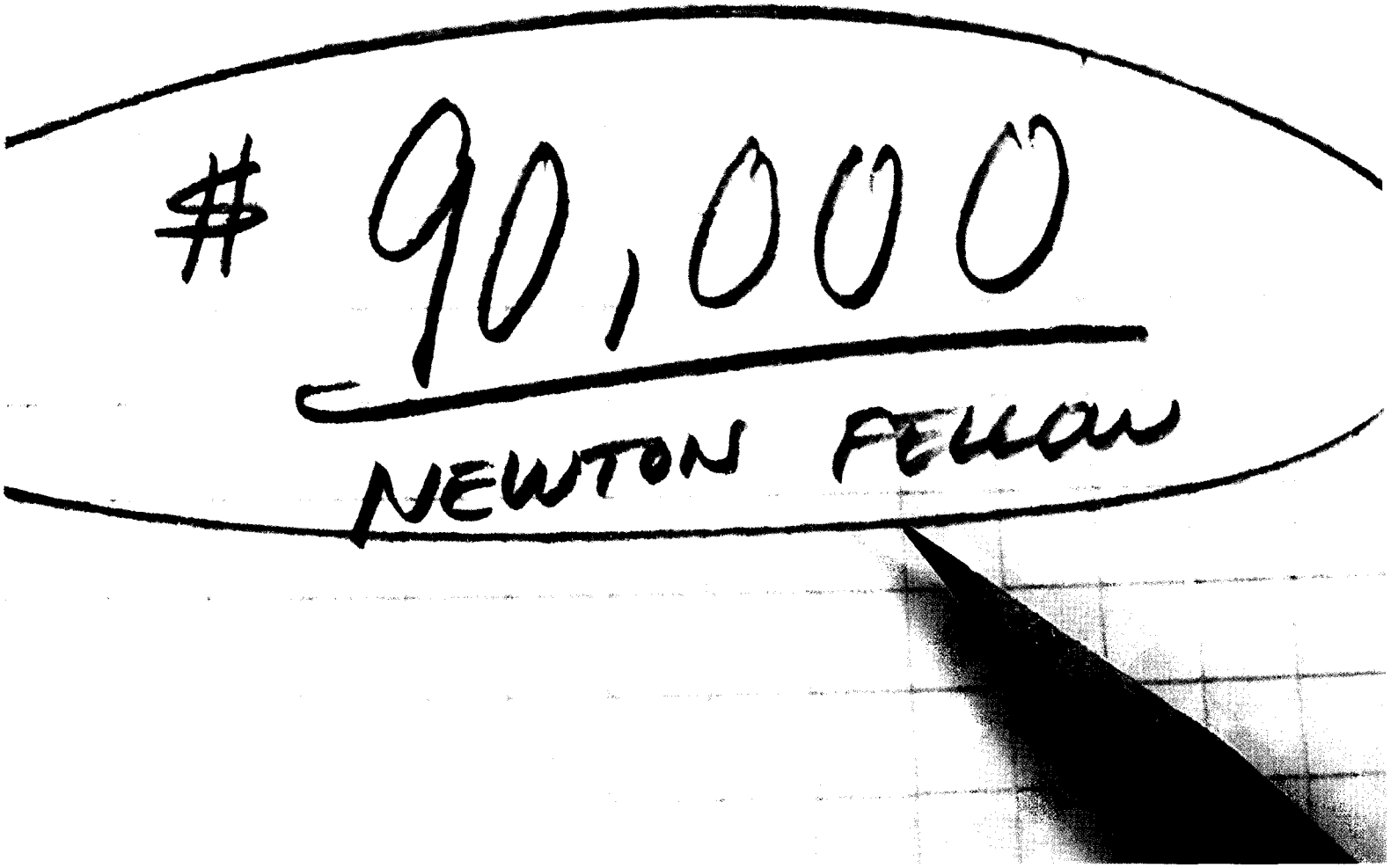
I thought about today's seniors at Central High, struggling to achieve in an economically depressed region. Do they have the skills necessary to succeed in college? Central High did not make the Adequate Yearly Progress standard under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and less than 20 percent of its students score "proficient" on state standardized math tests. We need to fix that.

To help struggling students, educators, parents, and policymakers need data. In response, I'm proud to say, our foundation helped to establish a new online data analysis service, SchoolMatters.com, a source of information and analysis about our nation's public schools.

When I graduated from Central High, college graduates earned 50 percent more than high-school graduates and twice that of dropouts. Today those college grads earn 80 percent more than high-school graduates and three times as much as dropouts. This is all the more reason to fix our schools. Public school gave me a foundation from which I was able, with hard work, imagination, energy, and an entrepreneurial spirit, to create success. And that's what I want public school to be again.

Eli Broad founded The Broad Foundation in 1999.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



You do the math.

The Newton Fellowship Program is looking for mathematically sophisticated individuals to teach in NYC public high schools. Newton Fellows earn competitive starting salaries on par with scientists, engineers and architects. The Fellowship provides an aggregate $90,000 in stipends, full tuition scholarship for a master's, mentoring, coaching, and professional development.

Nobody goes into teaching for the money. The best teachers do it out of love for the subject and a passion to inspire. As a Newton Fellow, you can have it all. So who better to teach math than you?

For a more rewarding future, apply for the Newton Fellowship at mathforamerica.org/newton

MfA
Math for America

The infinite possibilities of mathematical literacy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sometimes your big ideas
come to you at night.
Other times they
come to you online.
The Wallace Foundation's online Knowledge Center. Reliable research and information to help you effect change. Most school districts have the data they need to improve performance — in fact, their data overwhelms them. A new study, Buried Treasure: Developing a Management Guide From Mountains of School Data, shows how to pinpoint meaningful indicators and provides an example of a district management guide. You'll find it online — plus other studies to help you make a difference: How to improve student learning through effective leadership. How to strengthen hiring practices. How to train the qualified leaders every school deserves. Wallacefoundation.org/next. Think of us as your partner in big ideas: online, day or night.
Go to www.wallacefoundation.org/next to browse our library of free downloadable reports.
The Wallace Foundation
Supporting ideas.
Sharing solutions.
Expanding opportunities.

EDUCATION next
A JOURNAL OF OPINION AND RESEARCH

309 CGIS South
1730 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02138-3001
Tel. (617) 495-2491, Fax (617) 496-1507
Website www.educationnext.org

To subscribe or to submit change of address information, call us at 1-800-935-2882; visit us at www.educationnext.org; fax us at (650) 723-8626; email us at hooverpress@hoover.stanford.edu; or write to *Education Next* Subscriptions, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-6010

Nonprofit
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 26
Peterborough, NH
03458

**********AUTO**5-DIGIT 94301
10070 XXXX 1 245
Ron K Unz 94
No. 371
555 Bryant St
Palo Alto CA 94301-1704

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED